HOW TO WRITE
BUSINESS LETTERS

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IN COLLABORATION WITH
THE EDITORIAL STAFF OF SYSTEM

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ANNOUNCEMENT

TO give those who are interested in the study of business correspondence a discussion of the subject at once brief, logical, specific and practical is the purpose of this volume. In producing it, the demand every concern feels for more efficient letter writers has been a controlling factor. Not only the many specimen letters and paragraphs reproduced, but also the principles and rules have come out of the hard-earned experience of enterprising concerns. No effort has been spared to arrange this specific material so that it can most readily be grasped and applied.

Beginning with the simplest correspondence matters and letter forms, the discussion leads up to the writing of the successful sales letter, which is perhaps the most difficult as well as the most important form of business correspondence. In style and mechanical form the aim has been to make the book in a measure an illustration of the same arts of persuasion upon which advertisements and business letters depend for their vitality.

As each type of business letter is taken up, the reader or student is shown how to construct it paragraph by paragraph; securing attention; delivering a concise selling description, stating a collection arrangement or putting an adjustment into persuasive terms; proving a claim; proposing a contract, and closing the letter in a way which urges to action. As he works out these paragraphs, the correspondent can compare them with actual models which have sold goods, adjusted difficult complaints, collected slow accounts and handled efficiently the various problems of a business.

Only the free access to the confidential data of business houses which the publishers have for many years enjoyed has made this work possible. In many cases the source and history of these actual business letters cannot be made public. Among the firms which may be mentioned as having contributed valuable matter are: Portland Silo Company, The Regina Company, Franklin Automobile Company, Frank E. Davis Company, Horton Manufacturing Company, Geo. Stuhler's Sons Company, Peoples Gas Light and Coke Company of Chicago, Story & Story, Gray & Graham Company, Goodyear Tire and Rubber Company, Old Town Canoe Company, A. B. Farquhar Company, Link-Belt Company, Holeproof Hosiery Company, Superior Underwear Company, and Lasalle and Koch Company.

In the earlier editions of the book, issued under the title, "How to Write Letters That Win," of which many printings were demanded, twelve hundred business letters were studied, classified, and discussed. In the present completely reconstructed and much enlarged volume more than nineteen hundred letters have been considered. The correspondence files of many concerns have also been studied, and SYSTEM'S editors and letter writers, especially Mr. Dennis, Mr. Murphy and Mr. Sumner, have contributed freely of their experience with letter work.

For the present edition, credit is especially due to Professor Smart, head of the English department of Armour Institute of Technology and lecturer on business correspondence in the School of Commerce of Northwestern University, who has contributed much new material, and has thoroughly revised and rearranged the book. Grateful acknowledgment is made also to the hundreds of business men and teachers whose corrections and suggestions bearing upon the former editions have, we hope, made the present volume accurately reflect the best correspondence practice.

THE PUBLISHERS.

CHAPTER I

THE TONE OF A BUSINESS LETTER

IF THERE has been one development in the last generation that has contributed more than any other to business growth, it has been the development of the business letter. Letters—right letters—are no longer the mere stereotyped paper mediums of solicitation and acknowledgment. They are living, breathing personalities, with all the capabilities and characteristics of the men behind them.

Giving letters a personal tone

Forty years ago the only letters that showed symptoms of red-blooded authorship were impassioned love missives and the controversial letters of statesmen. Then someone, somewhere, conceived the idea that human interest could be woven into a business letter as well as into a personal message; that a business letter, after all, was but a personal message; and that it was possible to talk to a man a thousand miles away in the same words that you would use if he sat beside your desk.

That discovery, developed, has of itself dissolved distance and placed the inter-relationship of business men upon a basis of courtesy and intimacy that no other could accomplish. And more important, it has made possible the transaction of an enormous bulk of business at an insignificant fraction of what the personal handling of

Business-getting power of the personal letter

it would have cost. Over one hundred million dollars in sales made by one house last year entirely by mail—that is a specific example of results.

Personal tone means showing interest in the customer

Getting this personal tone in a business letter is largely a matter of showing a personal interest in the customer and his affairs. If you are writing a sales letter, emphasize the benefit he will derive from owning the article you are offering. If it is a collection letter, make him feel that you are fair, and considerate of his difficulties—until, of course, he has shown that he deserves no consideration. In a letter answering a complaint, not only adjust the difficulty, but show your desire to satisfy him in full, and make him realize that you really value his patronage. If it is an acknowledgment of an order, put a little warmth into your thanks. In other words, show that you are interested in the matter about which you are writing, and that you do not consider it merely as a part of the day's routine work.

How the personal tone can be secured

In the simpler forms of letters, such as the acknowledgment of orders, it is not difficult to show this personal interest, for there it is only a matter of dropping a few cordial words here and there in the letter. In the more complex forms, however, such as the sales letter, getting the right tone will require a special effort.

Regard each customer as an individual

In the first place you must learn to look upon each of your customers as an individual, not as an abstract being—one of a thousand men all of whom have the same characteristics. The latter is the attitude of the old-school correspondent. He says the same thing in the same way every time he writes about a certain matter. He makes no attempt to adapt his letters to the different classes of readers. He sees men in the mass, not as individuals; and seeing them thus he cannot help making his letters formal and impersonal.

We are not arguing here that you—the correspondent—must know all your customers personally, for

that is obviously impossible in a large business concern. If it were possible for you to do this, and then if you would dictate a personal letter to each customer, you would have the ideal conditions for carrying on business correspondence. But since this ideal is unattainable, you must find a substitute for it—you must create a typical individual to whom your letters are to be written.

"Create" a typical customer

The first step in this process of creation is to recognize the fact that men fall into certain broad classes each of which has certain general characteristics. Then group your customers according to these classes. There are various available means for determining to which one any given customer belongs. His trade or profession, and the section of country in which he lives will give some idea. Then you may judge from his letters, or you may get information from your traveling salesmen who know him, or you may form an estimate from a study of his former dealings with your house. This information is not difficult to secure, and the added effectiveness of your letters will more than repay you for the extra trouble involved in gathering it.

Place each customer in his proper class

Now, having placed the customer in a certain class, try to visualize a typical representative—an average man—of that class. Most public speakers single out some person, or perhaps two or three persons, in the audience, and gauge the effect of their speech on the audience by the effect on them. In this connection it is also interesting to note that one of the leading magazines on business is "written at" one business man, who is known to the editors. The attitude of the other subscribers toward the magazine is judged by his attitude, and his opinion is constantly sought. Of course he is not told that his judgment is utilized in this way, for the value of the test lies in his being unconscious of his influence. Likewise, a well-known housekeeping magazine is tested out on one woman, who also is unaware of the part she plays

Visualize a representative for each class

in shaping the policy of the paper. These people are selected as typical of the class for whom the speech or the magazine is intended.

Test the letter on this representative

So the business letter writer who would get the personal tone in his correspondence picks out a typical representative of each class of customers. It is usually some one whom he knows personally; and as he writes, he has this man's face before him and he tests his letter by the imagined effect upon his representative.

Having selected your "average" man, now talk to him as if he were face to face with you in your office. Imagine him there, and then try to talk to him in the meaningless jargon of the old-style business letter. Try the old formulas, "I beg to advise," "In reply to your valued favor, would say," and a hundred others like them. Can you think of yourself talking to a flesh-and-blood man in such ridiculous language? Then don't use it in your letters. You can't express personal interest in such stereotyped, impersonal language. Write naturally. Use words that mean something definite. Strive for an easy conversational tone.

Talk to him as if he were at your desk

In the beginning of the letter avoid worn-out and meaningless expressions, such as, "In reply to your esteemed favor of the 12th inst. we beg to advise," or "Your valued letter of the 15th ult. is at hand, and in reply would say." These strike the wrong note at the start; they can't convey any feeling of personal interest. If you want to acknowledge the receipt of a letter, do it naturally; as, "The catalogue for which you wrote on the 10th is being mailed to you today," or "We were sorry to learn from your letter of the 7th that the goods were damaged when they reached you."

Avoid the stereotyped beginning

Likewise, the old-fashioned complimentary close, "Hoping to hear from you soon, we beg to remain," or "Trusting that this arrangement will be satisfactory to you, we are," is hopelessly stilted and impersonal. Many letters—one might almost say the majority—do

not need a complimentary close. Finish what you have to say, and then sign your name: "Sincerely yours," or "Cordially yours, W. J. Adams." If you think something more is needed, make your statement carry a message of personal interest. "We shall await your reply with interest," or "We are confident that you will have no further trouble with this order," are very different in tone from the stock expressions cited above.

Close the letter naturally

Throughout the letter avoid conventional phraseology. Don't always "advise" a man; why not occasionally "inform" or "tell" him? Not every letter is an "esteemed" or "valued favor;" nor is every order "kind." Instead of saying that a letter "is at hand" or "has come to hand," say that you have "received" it. "July" or "August" is more natural and definite than "ult." or "inst." Don't give the impression that you are not in the habit of reading the letters that you receive, by telling a man that in the case of his letter the "contents were carefully noted." Remember that "begging" is not an honorable attitude among dignified business men. And finally, don't be ashamed of the personal pronoun "I." The foolish impression has grown up that it is immodest to use this perfectly good word in business correspondence. To be sure, it should not be overworked, but if your sentence requires it, use it.

Avoid worn-out phraseology

In the next letter you write, get a new way of expressing the old ideas. Make it original and distinctive. Make it a personal message. Do this a few times, and watch the results. It will not be long before you are wondering why you didn't rub the machine-finish off your correspondence long ago and *talk* business through the mail. There's a place for real letters in every business, and yours is one of them.

Try this—and watch the results

CHAPTER II

THE MAKE-UP OF A BUSINESS LETTER

Danger of ignoring accepted standards in the dress of letters

THE first estimate a business man makes of an unknown correspondent is based on the appearance of his letter. A business man who is familiar with the ordinary conventional forms of a letter, is quick to notice any departure from the accepted standards. His first impulse upon receiving a communication of unusual shape or arrangement is to criticise. It breaks away from the routine; it obtrudes itself upon his attention; it attracts his notice in the same way as a peculiar suit of clothes or a house of odd design, a unique table service, or any other object of everyday familiarity and use that departs from the forms to which he has been accustomed.

Accepted standards have been tested by experience

It is undoubtedly true that on rare occasions the effects of such changes are pleasing. But it is also true that the generally observed forms, especially of business letters, have been accepted for certain well defined reasons after practical experimenting. He who adopts new standards should do so cautiously and for cause; otherwise he may expect the same criticism that falls to him who adopts the unusual in dress or manner.

For practical purposes the size of a sheet of business stationery should be approximately 8 by 11 inches; even

Standard sizes in stationery are best

though it vary a little in either dimension, it should observe about these proportions. This size has been established by no single authority or group of authorities, and a correspondent may vary it if he wishes. A man once wrote a message on an oyster shell, stamped it, and the postal authorities, in the course of time, delivered it to the addressee. But the standard envelope is 3½ by 6½ inches in size, and a sheet about 8 by 11 inches folds into it very conveniently. This standard envelope is handled more quickly and safely by the post office than smaller ones that may get lost in the shuffle; the miscarriage of small, odd shaped envelopes used for sending out personal cards and announcements has caused more than one social faux pas.

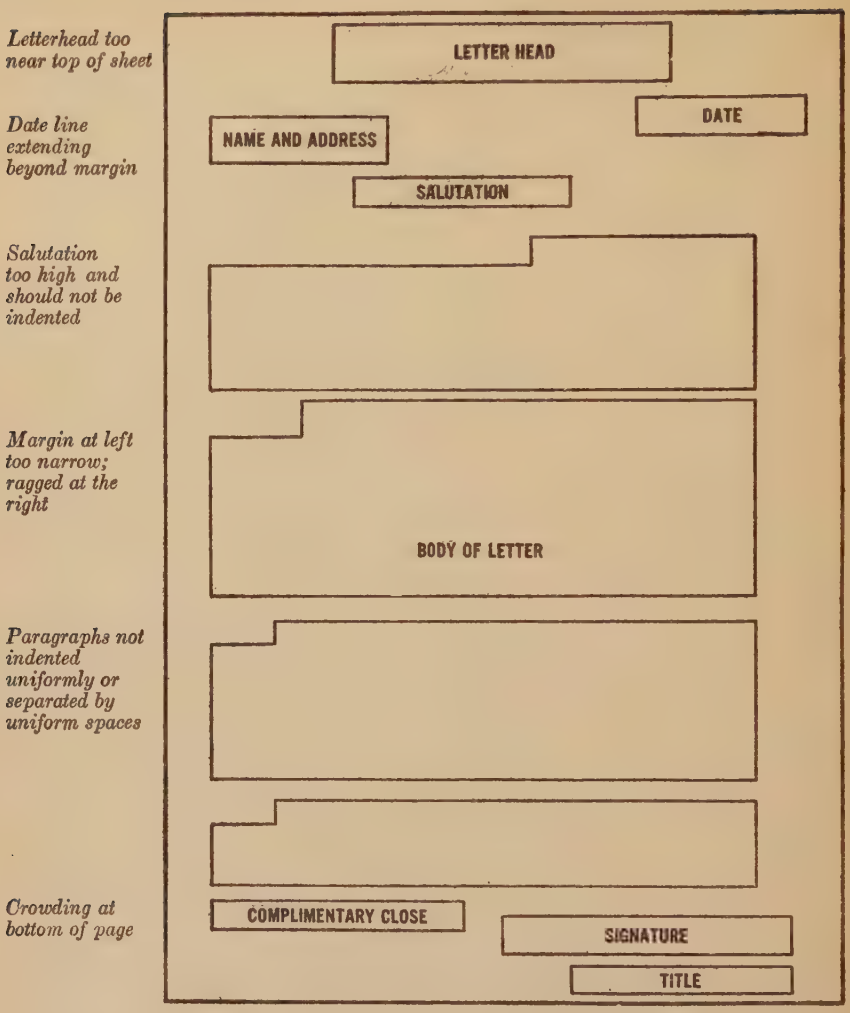
Variations to suit special uses

Furthermore, a sheet of these proportions is convenient to handle and to file. And as business houses generally observe the safe and sane usage, envelopes and sheets of standard size and form are preferred to the oyster shell school of originality. For legal documents, manuscripts, and other larger sheets, larger envelopes, also of standard size, are provided.

Value of engraved or printed stationery

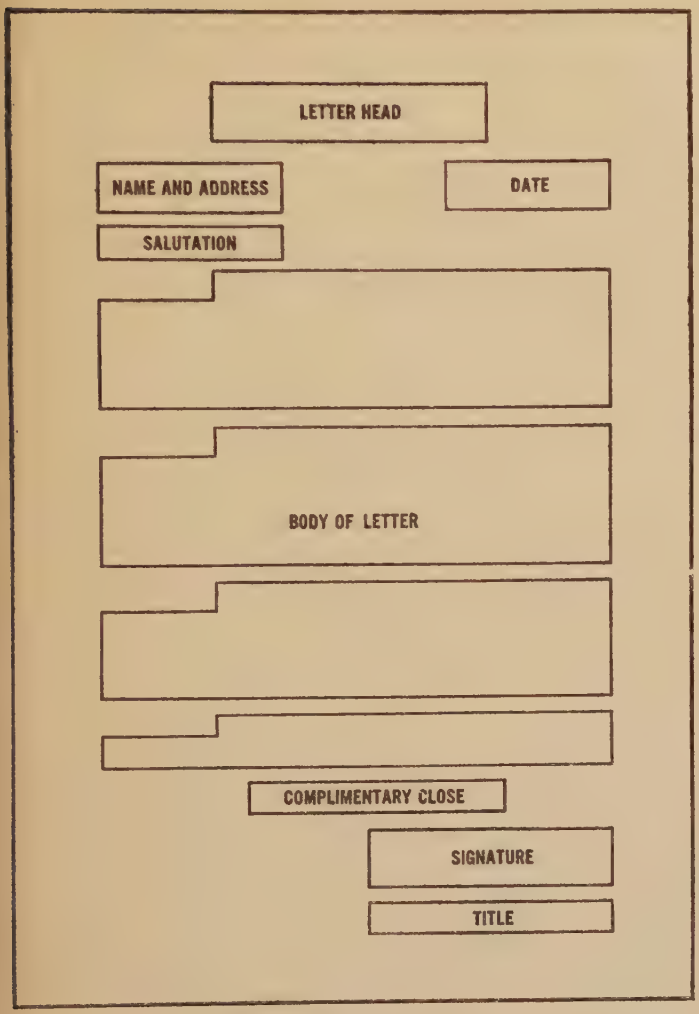
Every business letter should be written on business stationery—with a business letterhead; and should be sent out in an envelope with the name and address of the sender printed, lithographed, engraved, or otherwise clearly noted in the upper left corner. Then, in case of non-delivery, the official pointing-hand stamp of the post office, with the instructions "return to sender," may be affixed, without causing undue annoyance as is sometimes occasioned by placing the return address on the back of the envelope or in some other unusual place.

A copy should be kept of every communication that leaves the office. Either a carbon copy may be made at the time the letter is written (six good copies may be made simultaneously on the average typewriter machine, although only one is usually required), or a letter-press


Letterhead too near top of sheet
LETTER HEAD
Date line extending beyond margin
DATE
NAME AND ADDRESS
SALUTATION
Salutation too high and should not be indented
Margin at left too narrow; ragged at the right
BODY OF LETTER
Paragraphs not indented uniformly or separated by uniform spaces
Crowding at bottom of page
COMPLIMENTARY CLOSE
SIGNATURE
TITLE

COMMON ERRORS IN ARRANGEMENT

If, as somebody has said, a letter is a photograph of the business behind it, this arrangement of a one-page business letter would suggest a company in which the departments are out of proportion, improperly related, lacking in cooperation, and inefficient. As a result the letter would further suggest an unsatisfactory product, and tend to discourage buying.



A WELL-BALANCED ARRANGEMENT

In striking contrast to the arrangement on the opposite page this letter suggests to the mind of the reader a well-balanced, smoothly running, highly efficient business. It is easy to believe that the article offered for sale is as well-made as the letter. Hence this arrangement encourages buying. Like a good salesman, a letter should be at its best to represent the business effectively.

copy should be made from the sheet after it is signed. Both forms have been accepted by the courts as legal copies of correspondence. In the average office, constant reference is made to former correspondence; no business house can afford to ignore such a record. Carbon copies are usually filed alphabetically by the name of either the company or individual to whom the letter is addressed; letter-press copies must necessarily be filed chronologically even when separate books for each letter of the alphabet are maintained.

Keeping copies of correspondence

In either case the search through the files for a letter copy is facilitated by placing the name, address, and date of a letter at the top and in a uniform location. The date of a letter should be placed in the upper right corner of the page; the recipient must know when the communication is sent; it may have a bearing on other communications. The name and address of the addressee, corresponding to the address on the envelope, should in all cases be placed, as the formal salutation, in the upper left corner of the sheet. Not only does this establish at once the exact individual for whom the communication is intended, but it facilitates the filing of the correspondence.

Uniform position for dates and addresses

The margins of a business letter, owing to the limitations of the typewriter, are usually of variable width. The space occupied by the letterhead must, of course, determine the margin at the top of the sheet. Theoretically, the margins at the left and right should be of exactly the same size; practically, however, the typewritten lines will vary in length and cause an uneven edge on the right side. In printing, the use of slugs of different sizes not only between the words but between the letters themselves, rectifies these variations, but the typewriter is not so equipped. The more even the right margin is and the more uniform it is with the left margin, the better the effect. The margin should be about one or one and a half inches in width. The margin at

Pleasing appearance of well-balanced margins

the bottom should not be smaller and should be preferably greater than the side margins. Should it be smaller, the page will at once appear cramped for space, as the reading matter will be really running over into the margin—a typographical blunder that is as noticeable on typewritten as on printed pages (pp. 14, 15).

Running over into the margin

The spacing between the lines and between the paragraphs of a business letter may vary somewhat to suit the tastes of the individual, although considerations of a practical nature tend to establish a few general principles. Both for convenience and economy, for instance, a letter should be as compact as possible, both in words and in mechanical production; it should not take up two sheets if one will serve. Hence most business letters are single spaced: only a single space on the typewriter separates one line from another. Even when a letter is short, it is advisable, for purposes of uniformity, to use single spaces only.

Single spacing vs. double spacing

The first line of each paragraph is usually indented from five to fifteen points on the machine—each business house should establish exactly what this indentation shall be in order to secure uniformity in its correspondence. Instead of indenting the line, some concerns designate the paragraphs by merely separating them by several spacings, and beginning the first line squarely upon the left margin. The best practice, however, seems to embody both of these methods: the average business letter usually has its paragraphs separated by a spacing two or three times as great as the spacings between the lines, and the first line of the paragraph is usually indented. Under a third method, known as "hanging indentation," the first line of the paragraph begins close against the left margin, and the remaining lines are indented from five to fifteen points.

Beginning a paragraph—indented or flush

The use of uniform typewriter ribbons on all the machines operated by one concern is rapidly and properly coming into favor. It is good business to make all

Uniformity in typewriter ribbons

the letters issuing from one house similar in appearance. They should be uniform typographically—in spacings, margins, forms of salutation, addressing. And no one item is more important in securing this uniformity than similarity in the color of the typewriter ribbon. In recognition of this fact, most concerns now furnish their typists with ribbons that are bought in lots and kept in stock. Purple ribbons are perhaps the most popular, not only because the color is bold but also because the chemical ingredients used blend well and give a smooth, durable impression on the paper.

Approved forms for the envelope address

The address on the envelope, to which the salutation at the top of the letter should correspond either exactly or in slightly condensed form, may be properly typewritten in various ways. The style which is most observed, however, and which therefore has the stamp of approval, provides for an indentation of about five points on each line of the address. Still another approved though less popular form does not indent the lines at all. The spacings between the lines are usually single or double; greater spacing tends to separate the address too much to allow it to be read quickly.

Any radical departure from those forms should be made cautiously, especially if the various items of the address are separated from each other. The address, like a paragraph, is generally read as a unit—as a single distinct idea. The closer the address conforms to the generally accepted forms, the more readily are the envelopes handled by the post office and with less danger of delay or loss.

Neatness—a final caution

Even if all the foregoing details in the mechanical production of a business letter have been carefully observed, its effect may be destroyed by carelessness. A conspicuous erasure on the sheet, a blot, or a finger mark nullifies the impression that is created by an otherwise perfect page. Care should be taken to guard against creating any wrong impression.

CHAPTER III

INQUIRY, CONTRACT, AND ROUTINE LETTERS

IN EVERY business there are certain letters which are largely a matter of good English. Because of the simple nature of the transaction ordinarily involved, clearness and brevity are the chief essentials and are more easily attained than in the more complex forms of business correspondence. Among these simpler forms are letters of introduction, application, reference, recommendation, and also telegrams and cablegrams. In spite of their brevity, however, thousands of dollars or even the success of the venture sometimes hangs on the phrasing of such letters. Hence, exact, clean-cut expression is required in these forms of correspondence.

Simple forms of letters—clearness and brevity essential

The letter of introduction, as its name indicates, is written to introduce one of your acquaintances to another. It tells why the introduction is sought, establishes a bond of confidence, and requests that the bearer be given the assistance he desires. The way in which the matter is put is highly important in such an interchange of courtesies.

The letter of introduction

The following letter of introduction was written by the president of a widely advertised company to one of his business friends:

A specimen letter

This will introduce to you Mr. Frank Adams, who wishes to talk with you about your profit-sharing plan.

Mr. Adams is the secretary of our company and is planning to introduce some system for bringing our employees into closer relation with the firm.

Any information that you can give will be greatly appreciated by him, and your courtesies to him will be regarded as a personal favor to me.

The letter of application

The letter of application might be classed as a sales letter, for its object is to sell the applicant's services. As such, it requires, in its highest form, the same skill in presentation that is necessary in the more elaborate letter aiming to sell merchandise. The essential thing to remember in writing a letter of application is this: Consider what the business man wants, and show your ability to supply it. Try to put yourself in your prospective employer's position and imagine the questions he would put to you in a face-to-face interview; then answer those questions.

How to begin the letter

The business man wants to know at the start what connection your letter has with him. Therefore, in the opening paragraph of your letter, apply for the position that is vacant. The employer cannot have the proper viewpoint in reading a letter which gives a long account of your business career and only at the close makes the application.

Definite statement of qualifications for the position

This introductory paragraph is followed by a statement of your qualifications for the position. If you are answering an advertisement which contained instructions covering the reply, follow these closely. Cover fully, but not in too great detail, the points suggested as qualifications in the advertisement. If you are not answering an advertisement but know only that a vacancy exists, describe your qualifications for the position as you understand it. This statement may be in two parts: your business experience and your schooling. In the majority of cases it is advisable to tell your business experience first. Most employers prefer applicants who have already been trained in the work of the position to

be filled, and the earlier your letter catches the prospective employer's interest the more favorable will be your hearing. If your experience has been in a different line of work, however, try to lay your emphasis on those qualifications which the two positions (the one you have held and the vacant one) have in common.

Business experience in detail

In giving your business experience, do not say simply, "I have had five years' experience with a real estate firm." Name the firms for which you have worked; tell when and how long you were connected with each; and give the kind of work. If you are employed at the time of writing, tell why you wish to change your position. If you have had no business experience, make the most of your promise as raw material that can be worked up into a salesman, correspondent, clerk, or executive, as the case may be.

Education

In covering your education tell what schools you attended; how long; and whether you are a graduate or not. If you have taken special work—in a college or professional school, for instance—which would help you particularly in the position for which you are applying, tell about that specifically.

References and personal history

Then give references. In some cases these may be men who can speak merely of your character. It is better, however, to name men who can testify also as to your business experience and ability. In either case give their names and addresses in full.

The letter also calls for some detail of your personal history; as age, married or single, and nationality. The salary which you would expect should also be included if the advertisement asks for it. The letter often closes with a request for a personal interview.

The following is an example of the letter of application:

Please consider me an applicant for the position of chief accountant which you advertised in this morning's Times.

My business experience has been in the kind of work indicated in your advertisement, and includes:

Example of a detailed letter of application

Two years, just after graduation from high school, as accountant with Hill, Acton & Co., 212 S. State St., Chicago.

Three years as chief accountant with J. A. Brown & Son, 125 W. Monroe St., Chicago.

At present I am unemployed, due to a complete reorganization of the firm of Brown & Son.

I am a graduate of the four-year commercial course of the Robert Vail High School, and also of the Smith School of Commerce, class of 1914. In the summer of the same year I passed the Illinois C. P. A. examination, ranking second in a list of twenty-one. In the School of Commerce my chief work was in business organization, factory management, and accounting.

My references, by permission, are:

Mr. C. J. Bowen, 6512 University Avenue, who, I believe, is a friend of yours, and who can speak for my character and general ability.

Mr. A. F. Crowell, Sales Manager, Hill, Acton & Co.

Mr. B. T. Matthews, formerly general manager of J. A. Brown & Son, whose present address is 3128 W. Madison St.

I am 26 years of age, married, and of American parentage.

If you will grant me the favor of a personal interview, I can call at your office at any time convenient to you.

This is an example of a detailed letter of application. Sometimes a briefer letter is used. But the letter must not be so brief as to give incomplete information. It is always well, however, to pack all the information you can into as few words as possible.

The reference letter

When an employer writes to a person who has been named in a letter of application, the communication is a reference letter. An example is shown on page 23.

The letter of recommendation

Letters of recommendation are of two kinds: general and personal. The former are addressed "To Whom It May Concern," and are employed when the bearer wishes to apply for a position, to a number of different concerns, using the letter as often as necessary. The personal letter, written to a particular employer to whom application for a position has been made, is more effective.

The letter of recommendation should be specific and moderate in its terms and should show that the writer knows the applicant and his work well enough to speak authoritatively of them. No conviction is carried by the statement: "Mr. James Bailey is a man of good character and an excellent bookkeeper. I can confidently rec-

PLANKINGTON COMPANY
CHICAGO

Paste Photograph of Applicant Here

Photograph adds character to the letter

Smith and Jones Co., June 6th, 1915.

Weston, N. J.

Dear Sirs:

Fred W. Donny (photo attached) has applied to us for a position as lathe hand.

On his application he stated that he was in your employ for eight years, doing the same class of work, leaving April 20th, 1915, because he wished to come to Chicago.

We require all applicants to furnish responsible references as to their responsibility, qualifications for the position named, etc., and shall feel greatly obliged for replies to the questions below, together with any other information you may give us concerning him.

Its brevity encourages a prompt answer

Very respectfully,

Is his statement correct?

Is he, to your knowledge, of good character and habits?

Is his general conduct such as to entitle him to the confidence of his employers?

Do you consider him competent to fill the position he applied for?

Ample space left for answers to be filled in

REMARKS:

Dated Signed

MAKING THE REFERENCE LETTER EFFICIENT

This letter brings the actual information required. Pasting a photograph of the applicant on the reference letter lessens the possibility of getting an opinion on the wrong man. Typing the important questions beneath the signature and leaving ample space for answers to be written help to obtain a quick reply.

ommend him for any position for which he may apply."

Say, rather:

This letter gives specific information

Mr. James Bailey has been a bookkeeper with our firm for the last two years, and during that time has worked under my personal supervision. He is conscientious and careful, knows his work thoroughly, has good habits, and is entirely trustworthy. I should like to have him remain with us, but he feels that the opportunities for advancement are not as good here as they would be in a larger company. I have no hesitancy in recommending him for a position as bookkeeper or for general office work.

The telegram

The telegram—the "day message" in particular—is a business letter in condensed form. Ten words may be sent for a fixed rate, and an additional charge is made for each word above that number. The telegram endeavors to compress into ten words a message that would ordinarily be written in perhaps six or eight times that number. The message is expressed in brief phrases, instead of complete grammatical sentences. All punctuation is omitted—for each punctuation mark is counted as a word. Yet in spite of its brevity, the telegram must be so worded that it is easily understood and unmistakable in meaning.

For instance, you miss a train, and are thus unable to keep an appointment. If you were to write a letter, it would read somewhat in this fashion:

I missed my train at Clarendon Junction this morning and so will not be able to see you this afternoon as we had planned. I will arrive in Chicago Monday morning, and if it is convenient to you, will call at your office at 10 o'clock.

The following is the telegram that you might send:

Missed train Arrive Monday morning Meet your office 10 o'clock.

Many persons attain clearness and brevity in a telegram by wording it so that the verbs serve as punctuation, each marking the beginning of a new thought. Notice how this is done in the telegram cited above: "Missed—Arrive—Meet."

The cablegram

The principles observed in writing a telegram hold good for cablegrams. However, the greater cost of the

latter has developed the code method of transmission. Code words are often used for the name and address as well as the message. There are several kinds of service.

A group of letters—brief but intimately connected with the business

We come now to a somewhat different class of letters. Like the preceding ones, they are brief; but they are more intimately connected with the actual conduct of the business. These are the letters on which the buying and selling are done, the letters which develop the contracts between manufacturer, merchant, and customer, the letters which involve the policies on which the business rests. Among such letters are market inquiries, replies to inquiries, requests for credit information, customer letters ordering goods, purchasing letters by the buyer for the company, and letters acknowledging orders.

The letter of inquiry

The letters of inquiry discussed in the present section are not to be confused with those which are written in answer to an advertisement and which are handled by the regular sales letter and follow-up. The letter referred to here is a special one usually asking for information regarding points not suggested by an advertisement, and needs a special letter in reply. These inquiries and their answers are so varied in nature that definite rules to fit all cases cannot be given.

An inquiry should always be clear and specific, giving all the explanation that is needed for making a complete answer.

The reply to the inquiry

The reply must take up each part of the inquiry separately and answer it fully. It is not sufficient to send a catalogue and tell the inquirer to look through it and find what he wants. If a catalogue is sent, the reply will direct his attention to the definite articles listed in it which will fulfill the requirements stated in the inquiry.

The following is an example of a letter of inquiry:

A party consisting of two friends and myself are going on a canoeing and camping trip in northern Wisconsin. As none

A definite letter of inquiry

of us has had much experience in this sort of thing, I am writing for information as to the outfit which we should procure.

We shall need a canoe, a tent with complete fittings, and suitable clothing. There are many portages to be made, and consequently the outfit must be light enough to be carried easily. We do not care to pay more than $200.

Can you give me the information that I want?

The following is the reply:

We are always glad to furnish information about outfits for camping parties. During the past five years we have equipped many such parties, and we are confident that our experience will be of benefit to you.

We are sending our latest catalogue, which gives a complete list of all the things that a camper will need.

Our canoe, No. 12, described on p. 28, is just the kind that you want. It is light, strong, and inexpensive. We sell more of this type than of any other one, and it has given general satisfaction.

This letter answers each question clearly

On p. 14 you will find a complete camping outfit (No. 15 A), consisting of a tent, blankets, cooking utensils, and everything else that you will need, including a compact and complete First Aid bag. In selecting this outfit we have been guided by our five years' experience in this sort of work and by the advice of several experienced campers.

The suit, No. 18, listed on p. 4, has been a favorite with our customers. It is light, yet warm and waterproof. The hunting boots, No. 6, on p. 7, are our standard line, and are guaranteed light, durable, and comfortable.

The total cost of the outfit outlined above, adapted for three persons, is only $175, and it will be good not only for this trip but for many others.

We shall be glad to give you further information on any other matters that may come up. When you are ready for the goods, let us know, and they will be sent out on the day that the order is received.

The letter asking for credit information

Another form of inquiry is the letter asking for credit information. Smaller retail stores use credit letters less frequently than large department stores, wholesale houses, and manufacturing concerns. Instead, credit arrangements are usually worked out in a personal conversation. In the larger stores, however, the "credit man" must often determine by letter to whom he will extend credit, how large a line of credit, and what terms of sale shall be given. To decide this he must first find out the amount of the customer's capital, the volume of his business, and his standing in his home community. This information is obtained from commercial

agencies, such as Bradstreet's or Dun's, banks, other customers of the house, other business men, traveling salesmen, and the prospective customer himself. In his dealings with the customer the credit man will find it necessary to use this information in a variety of ways; such as, refusing credit, granting credit, extending larger credit, decreasing it, holding up credit pending an investigation, insisting on regularity in observing the conditions on which credit was granted, and offering credit as an inducement to larger purchases. Since so much depends on this information, the credit man must be sure that he gets it accurately; and hence the letter by which he secures it is of great importance.

Wide range of use for this information

This letter illustrates the usual method of requesting credit information:

Dear Sir:

Mr. Ford MacKenzie, a grocer who has recently moved to Boston, and who seeks to open a credit account with this company, has referred us to you.

Will you give us, in confidence, your opinion of his financial standing, habits of payment, and general credit worthiness? How long did you sell to him? What terms did you extend? What was his highest recent credit? How much does he owe? What is past due?

A courteous letter with specific questions

We shall heartily appreciate any information you may see fit to give us. For your convenience we enclose a stamped envelope. We will gladly extend you similar courtesies whenever we can do so.

Yours very truly,

Instead of grouping the questions in the body of the letter itself, as in the second paragraph, some correspondents list them below the signature, in order to permit the answers to be filled in quickly without necessitating a formal letter in reply.

The customer letter ordering goods usually contains three chief elements: a list of the goods ordered; directions for shipping; and notification of the method of payment. In addition, if you are ordering from a catalogue, the number or date of the latter should be given, as the price or style may vary in different catalogues. Also, in large concerns, where a number is given to each

The customer letter ordering goods

purchase order for convenient reference in future correspondence concerning it, that also is included.

Accurate description of goods ordered

Each article or item in the list of goods should be described accurately as to quantity, color, size, style, price, or any other point necessary for correct filling of the order. Each item should be given in a separate line or paragraph, as this arrangement facilitates the reading and checking of the list. If the list is long, it is better to put it on a separate sheet to be enclosed with the letter.

Instructions for shipping; and method of payment

The letter should state how shipment is to be made—by parcel post, express, or freight. In the last two methods, the express company or railway by which the goods are to be forwarded, is usually named. The destination should be indicated clearly when it is not the same as the address of the writer.

The date when the shipment is to be made is also to be noted. Under ordinary circumstances the words "Ship at once" or "Send at once" are sufficient; but sometimes the letter requests a rush shipment or asks that the goods not be sent until a certain time.

Finally, the method of payment is given, unless the writer is an old customer and the method is understood. If the money is enclosed, attention should be called to it, together with the manner of sending, as by check or money order.

Purchasing letters

Purchasing letters—those used in buying supplies or in ordering factory materials or goods for stock—fall into four general classes: letters asking for quotations; order letters; adjustment letters; and special letters.

The letter asking for quotations

The letter asking for quotations naturally comes first. It states exactly what the specifications are, or encloses a sample, and asks for the best price that can be made. The following is an example:

> We expect to be in the market soon for 150,000 statements to be printed exactly as the enclosed sample.
>
> In view of the special facilities which you have for producing this type of work, we believe that you can make us a sat-

isfactory price on this job, and therefore ask that you submit a quotation at your earliest convenience.

The order letter

The order letter may follow in due course. In larger concerns a form is usually provided for this purpose, with the necessary headings and columns printed on it. This leaves only the itemized order and any special directions to be written in the body of the letter. In cases where such forms are not used, a special order letter is employed. It will be more technical than the general order letter, for it is usually written by one firm to another one in the same, or an allied, business, and will therefore freely use the trade terms and abbreviations. For example:

Please furnish us, subject to the following prices, specifications, and conditions, your best quality, open-hearth-steel boiler rivets, all button head:

600 lbs. ⅞″ x 2½″
400 lbs. ⅞″ x 2¾″

This material is to be invoiced at 2.5c per lb. net, f. o. b. your mill, freight allowed to Chicago; terms 30-2-10 as in your quotation No. 8643, of August 28. We note that shipment will be made in two days from receipt of the order. We are, therefore, counting on you to ship these rivets not later than Thursday of this week.

The adjustment letter

The adjustment letter gives notice of some mistake in filling the order; such as, substituting an inferior quality of goods, or an error in quantity, price, carriage charge, and similar matters. It suggests some method of adjustment which the dealer may accept or decline or change as he thinks best.

The special letter

Finally, the special letter takes up some phase of the transaction that differs from the usual line of procedure. For instance, it may request a special price or a special time for shipping. An example of the first class follows:

We are just in receipt of your letter of August 25, quoting a price of $4.50 a dozen on your garment No. 4562.

We like the style and material of this article very much, but on account of the competition in this city, we are compelled to sell this garment at 50c each. With your experience in handling this type of merchandise, you must realize that it is impossible to operate with this small margin of profit.

An example

If, however, you could arrange to make us a price of $4.15 a dozen, we could no doubt use a large quantity. If you can let us handle your merchandise on this basis, please let us know at once.

All these purchasing letters, which constitute contracts, are communications from the buyer to the seller. They may, therefore, be made more formal and less personal than a letter in which a firm is addressing a customer whom it wishes to satisfy. The essential characteristics are brevity, clearness, and fairness—for fairness pays at both ends of a transaction.

The letter of acknowledgment

As soon as an order is received, a letter of acknowledgment should be sent. This tells the customer that his order has not been lost, and completes the contract.

How it begins

The letter begins with the acknowledgment of the order, usually accompanied by a word of thanks; as "Your order of the 10th has just been received, and I thank you for it," or "Thank you for your order of the 10th."

Then follows a statement of what has been done with the order. If it has been filled as received, this statement will be merely that the goods have been forwarded, or will be forwarded on a certain date.

What has been done with the order

If the goods are not sent as ordered, the statement will do two things. First, it will give the reason for not carrying out the order. This reason may be that the line has been discontinued; the goods are temporarily out of stock; not enough money was enclosed; or the order is held up until the cash or further credit information is received. In case cash is required before shipment, care must be taken to base your request on strict business considerations.

Secondly, the letter will tell or suggest how the difficulty is to be adjusted. The customer may be notified that the money is being returned, and a revised catalogue sent to prevent future ordering of discontinued lines; or he may be requested to send more money, pay cash, or give credit references, as the case demands.

The close of the letter

The letter frequently closes with a few words inviting further orders. The purpose of this part of the letter is to give a touch of personal interest to the acknowledgment. Sometimes, however, this personal close is omitted.

A letter used when goods are shipped as ordered

The following is a letter written when the goods are sent as ordered:

Thank you for your order of the 15th.

I have seen that your goods were properly packed and shipped. They should reach you now in two days. Let me know if they do not come promptly or if you have any question to ask about them.

I am confident that you will be thoroughly satisfied with this shipment. I am therefore looking forward to other orders from you in the near future. How may we serve you further?

A letter used when the order is held up

The next letter is one used when the order is held up until the cash has been sent in:

I have just received your order of the 8th and thank you for it.

However, we make it a rule to sell only for cash, and for this reason, we request all our customers to include the money with their orders. The quick turns of capital which such a policy enables us to make are one of the reasons why it is possible for us to sell our goods cheaply. Under the circumstances, I know you would not want me to make an exception in your case.

Your order amounts to $18.55. Will you please mail this sum to me today? An addressed envelope is enclosed for your convenience.

I am holding your goods ready to ship the same day your remittance reaches us.

CHAPTER IV

ADJUSTING COMPLAINTS BY LETTER

A satisfied customer is the object of the adjustment letter

IF IT pays to spend large sums in advertising and sales campaigns to get new customers on your books, it is worth while to make a special effort to keep them there. No legitimate business transaction is really completed until the customer is satisfied with his purchase. A satisfied old customer often represents more potential business than a bookful of untried prospects. If you have given him a square deal, he never stops saying good things about your business; but if you have left him dissatisfied, he never stops driving it away.

In spite of this fact, however, many business men will unhesitatingly appropriate large sums for the selling campaign, and then content themselves with the most perfunctory and formal adjustment of complaints. If the customer is to judge of their attitude from the tone of their adjustment letters, their interest in the transaction ceased when they got his money.

The wrong attitude toward complaints

This disregard for future business dealings with the customer is little short of criminal, and the offense is made all the worse by the fact that the remedy is comparatively simple. It is not a hard matter to show a man that you have given him at least all you have agreed to give him, if you go about it in a courteous, tactful

way. Most people have more than a spark of reasonableness in them and an ability to recognize a fair proposition when they see it. If they haven't, they haven't the possibilities of being good customers, and no concession, however generous, would ever satisfy them. How to handle the complaint of the man whose business is worth while is suggested on pages 36 and 37.

The method used varies with the classes of complaints

Satisfying the customer is largely a matter of getting the right attitude. The right attitude, in turn, is determined by the nature of the complaint. The majority of complaints fall into four general classes: (1) house at fault, claim granted; (2) house not at fault, claim refused; (3) house not at fault, but claim granted in full or in part; (4) fault undetermined, further investigation needed.

First class: house at fault, claim granted

In the first class the question of attitude is not difficult. You acknowledge the mistake frankly, explain how it occurred, and minimize it. Then you rectify it. Finally, you express your regrets, and tell the customer that a similar mistake will not occur again. Here the emphasis is laid on regrets and greater care in handling future orders.

Second class: house not at fault, claim refused

It is in the second class that getting the right attitude is most difficult. You have to refuse the request, and yet satisfy the customer. How will you do it? Here the emphasis is on making him see that his request is unjust and that your method of settling it is fair. If you expect to do this, don't start out by telling him point blank that he is wrong and that you can't grant his claim.

Begin by looking at the proposition from his viewpoint. Look at it through his eyes. Tell him that you don't blame him—that if you were in the same circumstances you would probably feel the same way. You have thus established a bond of sympathy, created an impression of fairness. Then show him tactfully that he is wrong. Explain why you can't grant his claim—and make him see the fairness of your position

The wrong way to handle this class of complaints

A book dealer sold a business book to a clerk in a railway office, and the young man on receiving it complained that while the volume might be all right for a man in an established business, it was of no practical value to him. Now the dealer might have replied:

Dear Sir:

Don't think that because the book seems of no use to you, we are going to take it back and refund your money. You certainly understood the nature of this book before you ordered it, and if you didn't want it, that was the time to say so instead of now after we have gone to the expense of sending it to you and after the deal is closed. Under the circumstances, we cannot take the book back.

Understand, that's what he might have said, because that's just the tone in which many complaints are answered every day. But he actually wrote thus:

The right way

Dear Mr. Gimbel:

I believe I understand perfectly just how you feel about the book. You feel that because your position is a detail one, because your work is limited in its scope, the book is too comprehensive to help you very much just now. And that would seem, at first thought, a very just objection.

But in reality, because your work is limited now, and because the book is comprehensive, aren't you that very man the book will help most?

Every man wants to get out of the rut, to grow, to develop into something better. Yet who is the man who wins promotion? Is it the clerk whose work is limited to his own routine of details? No, it is the man who knows not only his own work, but that of the man above him. And that is just what this book will enable you to learn. For it gives you the experiences of the most successful men in the country; it describes in detail their methods and the results.

The difference in effect

Now in reply to either of these letters the young man would have kept the book; but in the first instance he would have kept it because he had to, in the second he could keep it because he wanted to. And that is the difference between the effect of a poor answer to a complaint and a good one.

In the third class, the house is not at fault, but the claim is granted. In this class your care will be not to allow your manner of granting the request to leave a lingering feeling of resentment. Don't grant the claim

grudgingly—do it cheerfully. Don't tell the man bluntly that his complaint is unjust but you "suppose you will have to grant it anyway." Make him understand that you realize the fault does not lie with you, but that you value his good will enough to do more than fairness and justice require. You are willing to do more than you have to do, in order to save him trouble. There's a big difference between these two attitudes. The first leaves him with the impression that he is being treated as an object of charity. The second leaves him with a feeling of obligation to repay your fairness, a feeling that will be valuable in turning his future business to you. It is not a "galling" obligation.

Third class: house not at fault, but claim granted

If a customer writes that goods he ordered two weeks before have not arrived, and that he doubts whether you ever sent them, don't reply by saying:

The wrong way of handling

If the goods you ordered have not reached you, it is certainly due to no fault of ours. We sent them promptly and hold the express receipt to prove it. You should know that goods are often lost by the express companies even though the greatest care is shown in preparing them for shipment. Under the circumstances, we think you are hardly warranted in accusing us of not having sent them. When we say a thing, you may depend upon it. If you doubt our responsibility or standing, you may write to the First National Bank of this city or look us up in Dun's or Bradstreet's.

However, inasmuch as you say you did not get the goods, we are duplicating the order, and would ask you to notify us if the first order shows up.

If you are going to concede the justice of his complaint at all or if you are going to grant him his claim simply as a favor, do it cheerfully and make the customer realize that you are giving him more than what is justly coming to him. Write to the man whose goods have not reached him, in this style:

The right way

Dear Mr. Chapman:

You are certainly justified in complaining over not having received the goods you ordered by express fully two weeks ago. You have been very considerate in waiting so long, and we appreciate fully how you feel about the matter now.

It seems to us that there can be no question that the fault lies with the express company. The express receipt we

A letter sent by a local agent to the clothes house he represented

Gentlemen:

The suit which you just sent us for Mr. E. F. Dickinson has arrived in bad condition. The lower part of one trouser leg is badly scorched. This was undoubtedly done by the man who pressed the suit.

To his mind a just complaint

It is impossible for us to alter or remedy this in any way; so we are returning the trousers to you by today's express and would ask that you immediately replace them.

Very truly yours,

A DEALER'S COMPLAINT

This is how the correspondent answered

Dear Sir:

We have your letter of the 25th and have carefully examined the trousers.

After examination we can confidently say that it is impossible for the trousers to have been damaged in the way you suggest. We employ electric irons for all our pressing, and they are scientifically heated so that they never reach a temperature hot enough to scorch the surface of the most delicate material.

Virtually accuses dealer of covering a blunder of his own

The trousers were undoubtedly damaged in the shop of your local tailor where you sent them to be pressed, as it is an easy matter to scorch a fabric with the old fashioned tailor's goose.

Then promises it "shall not happen again"

While we feel that we are in no way responsible, we have nevertheless decided to replace the trousers with a new pair. These will be shipped to you Thursday. This shall not happen again.

Yours very truly,

LOSING TRADE THROUGH AN UNTACTFUL REPLY

These three letters are an excellent example of how business may be lost through an untactful handling of a complaint and how it may be saved when skill and care are used. The first letter was sent by a local agent for "made-to-order" clothes to the house he represented. The unsatisfactory reply accuses the

Dear Mr. Bridges:

It seems that those very orders on which we are most anxious to please are the ones on which the annoying little accidents occur.

We are keenly desirous of giving Mr. Dickinson a suit he will feel proud of. He has been a good and valued customer of yours, and that has meant a number of suits ordered through you from us.

We are totally at a loss to understand how this accident could have happened. But why try to explain it? The time we would spend investigating, we have spent in rushing through the pair of trousers to replace the pair you returned.

We will get these to you by express Wednesday. Please apologize to Mr. Dickinson for us and make the apology as sincere as we would were we on the ground. In closing we can only assure you that we will be doubly careful in the future.

Very truly yours,

Suppose the complaint had been answered this way

Concedes the justice of the complaint

Recognizes value of dealer's and customer's patronage

AN ANSWER THAT WINS MORE BUSINESS

dealer of covering a blunder of his own, but later practically admits the fault to be the firm's after all. The third letter, which suggests the answer that should have been written, immediately concedes the justice of the man's complaint, expresses sincere regret, and shows a spirit of prompt cooperation. Such a letter would doubtless have meant many a dollar to the firm.

This letter satisfies the customer

hold shows that the goods were received by them in good condition the very day your order reached us. We knew you were in urgent need of this stock, and we made a special request for quick service in selecting and packing it.

As your experience has probably shown you, many concerns hold that their responsibility ceases the moment the goods are turned over to the express company. However, we always consider the interests of our customer as more important than a technical privilege of this kind, and we never consider a transaction closed until the goods are received and found to be entirely satisfactory.

So we are having a duplicate shipment packed and forwarded to you today. We are confident that these goods will reach you almost as soon as this letter, and in perfect condition.

The matter of delay in the previous shipment we shall take up with the express company at once and shall have them trace the goods. In the meantime, should they chance to reach you, we will thank you to return them to us, charges collect.

There you have an answer that not only satisfies the customer in every point, but that is bound to make him realize that you are more than fair; and the incidental talk about your service gives the letter a little sales value that the customer isn't likely to forget.

Fourth class: fault undetermined, to be investigated

In the fourth class your attitude will be one of open-minded fairness: you will do all you can to find where the mistake lies and to correct it. Don't assume that the mistake is necessarily his—you may make a mistake. For instance, if a man orders twenty reams of paper from you and on receipt of it writes that it is not like the sample he ordered from, don't say:

Dear Sir:

Your eyesight must be going back on you. The paper you ordered is certainly identically the same stock as the sample you named. Take it to the window and look again.

Putting yourself in a false position

If you do that, you not only insult his intelligence, but you may be putting yourself in a false position, for there's just a chance that a mistake was made in the stock or shipping room and that the customer is right. Better write him something like this:

Dear Mr. Blake:

We are surprised to learn that the Golden bond does not seem to match exactly the sample from which you ordered. Could you by any chance have gotten this confused with Gordon bond, which is right next to it in the sample book? These two lines are very similar in finish, and the fact that there is also a

similarity in the names has given rise to errors of this kind once or twice before. I wish you would refer to the book and see whether this might be the cause of the discrepancy.

If it is not, and you will send us a sample of the order you received, we will have the trouble looked up here immediately. We are always very careful to check over outgoing stock and see that it is just what is ordered, but we realize that an error might have been made somewhere in the process of packing and shipping, and we will be more than glad to correct it.

That not only protects you, but also shows the man your serious interest in putting matters right.

"Don'ts" for adjustment letters

Now for a few "don'ts" concerning your attitude:

Don't be too suspicious of every complaint that comes over your desk. Remember that when the customer wrote his letter, he believed he had cause for doing so, and that the chances are he did have. Remember that most people want to be square with you, that most people are honest, and that by far the greater share of the complaints you get have a real cause at bottom. The fault may not be yours, but that is no reason why you should snap up a man for telling you about it. If you are not to blame, the proper thing to do is to find out where the trouble lies, and help the customer to straighten out the difficulty.

Don't be too suspicious

Don't be flippant. Answer the complaint seriously. Even if you are sure that the customer is wrong and that his complaint is wholly unwarranted, treat it as seriously as if it were justified. Your aim is to satisfy the customer, and you can't do that by ridiculing him or his judgment. The example given on page 38 is a rather extreme case, but it illustrates a tendency all too common among writers of adjustment letters.

Don't be flippant

Don't allow yourself to make an angry reply to anything that the complainant may write. Back talk simply irritates the customer instead of pacifying him, and leaves the grievance farther from settlement than it was before. And what is more, you ought not to give the unreasonable kicker the satisfaction of knowing that he has stirred your temper.

Don't get angry

Answer the complaint promptly

There remains to be stated one other caution: answer the complaint promptly. An immediate reply goes a long way toward impressing a man with your sincere desire to see him satisfied. If he isn't specific enough in his complaint to enable you to answer fully, write at once for further information. If it is going to take you several days to investigate, write him first and tell him what you are doing. Every day that a complaint hangs over it becomes increasingly hard to handle, whereas quick attention will preclude many possibilities of future unpleasantness.

Three elements in an answer to a complaint

Thus far we have been considering the attitude of the correspondent toward the complaint. Now for an analysis of the elements of the typical answer to a complaint. These elements are three in number. The first tells where and how the mistake was made; the second, what we will do about it; the third, how we feel about it. In all of these the right attitude, as outlined above, must be maintained. The purpose of all of them is to satisfy the customer; not merely to correct the present mistake but also to make him a future customer and a living advertisement of the fair dealing of our firm.

First element: how the mistake was made

The first element consists of a history of the transaction as revealed by our records and investigation. If the house is at fault, it explains how the mistake was made—through oversight in filling the order, delayed shipment, goods out of stock, mistake in billing, and the like. If the house is not at fault, it traces the error to its sources—to the railway or express company or to the customer's own mistake in ordering, etc. This is the part of the letter which says, for example:

> Before your order left our warehouse all the goods were carefully gone over to make sure that they were perfect in every respect. However, the item you mentioned must have failed to catch the attention of our inspector.

Or this may be the explanation:

> Your goods left our warehouse on the 14th, and should have

reached you by this time. Apparently, however, they have been lost or delayed somewhere on the way.

Second element: how the error will be rectified

The second element tells how the error will be rectified. For example, it promises to send a duplicate shipment, or to send out a tracer for a lost shipment; it offers to take back or exchange the goods, or, for sufficient reasons definitely stated, refuses to do that; or it suggests that the customer recover damages from the carrier company. Here are two typical illustrations:

We are having duplicates packed and sent to you today. Kindly return the damaged goods to us, at our expense, as soon as possible.

Or in this manner:

We have found it impossible for us to exchange goods. You can see how the cost of rehandling such orders in the correspondence and bookkeeping departments, and, above all, the cost of packing and handling the exchanged goods, would completely swallow up our profit. We should have to raise the prices on all our goods in order to meet this extra expense. We feel sure that you will be able to put to use the goods you received on your order, and we know they will give you excellent service.

Third element: how we feel about the mistake

The third element—"how we feel about it"—may express our regret for the inconvenience the mistake has caused the customer; may assure him that we will make special efforts to prevent the occurrence of such mistakes in the future; or may remind him that our policy is always to be fair, and even more than fair, in order to satisfy our customers. It may do all or any of these things. For example:

I am sorry that this occurrence has caused you inconvenience and delay. I have given this matter my personal attention, and you may count upon perfect satisfaction. You may rest assured that special care will be taken with your orders in the future to prevent such a mistake from occurring again.

In the following illustration the three elements have been assembled to form a complete letter:

A typical letter containing these three elements

I was sorry to hear that the goods, when they reached you, were not in perfect shape.

We make it a rule to go over very carefully all goods that leave our warehouse, so as to be sure that they are perfect in every respect. However, the items you mention must have failed to catch the attention of our inspector.

Our shipping department now has instructions to forward

duplicates to you today. We will ask you to return the damaged goods to us at our expense, and with as little delay as possible.

I am confident that this matter will not give you any further trouble. Some few mistakes are certain to occur, but you may rest assured that we are always glad to rectify an oversight made by any department of our house.

This letter contains the three elements in concise form. The mistake is explained in the second paragraph, and the reader is led to believe that such mistakes do not occur often. The third paragraph tells what has been done to correct the error. The writer's feeling concerning the mistake is expressed in the last paragraph, and is also used in the first paragraph to give the keynote of regret for the error.

Variations in their use

Of course these elements do not always occur in this order. For example in the letter to Mr. Chapman, on p. 35, the chief treatment of the "How we feel" element is given in the third paragraph, before the remedy is taken up.

Nor are the elements always as clearly defined as they are in the illustrations quoted above. Thus, in the letter to Mr. Blake, on p. 38, the cause of the difficulty has not been determined, and therefore that cannot be explained and no definite remedy can be given. But the elements are all there, in less definite form.

Conclusion

In conclusion, remember that in answering a complaint the purpose is not only to adjust the present difficulty, but also to satisfy the customer so that he will remain a customer. If you are to do that, you must make your letter personal and sympathetic. And the best way to put yourself into this right attitude is to stop and consider how you would handle the customer if he came personally into your office. You wouldn't quarrel with him; you would be courteous, and would do your best to show how sincerely desirous the firm is of giving him a fair deal.

CHAPTER V

COLLECTING BY MAIL

IT IS one thing to induce a man to take something that he wants; it is quite another to induce him to give up something that he wants. Therein lies the vital difference between the sales and the collection letter.

The fundamental difference between sales and collection letters

The sales letter writer has the pleasant task of presenting an article in such an alluring way that the reader is willing to part with his money to own it. The writer of the collection letter, on the other hand, must persuade a man to give up his money for an article which he already has in his possession, and from which he has already, in part at least, derived his profit. In other words, this writer has the proverbially difficult task of inducing a man to "pay for a dead horse."

Wide knowledge of human nature needed by the collection writer

He who would do this must bring into play a wide knowledge of human nature and an adaptability that will enable him to use the wise argument in the right place. The common division of debtors into three classes—good, slow, and bad pay—is true enough so far as it goes, but the problem is not so simple as that. Between the two extremes of good and bad pay debtors, there are a thousand gradations, representing men of many different characteristics and in many different circumstances. Each presents an individual problem for

solution. The successful collection writer cannot afford to ignore these individual problems, these manifold characteristics, that make up human nature.

The misuse of form letters

Recognizing this, collection managers are coming more and more to see the element of danger in a too strict adherence to the use of form letters. In the handling of a great many small accounts, as in a mail order house or one selling to the consumer on the instalment plan, they are, of course, an economic necessity; and in a commercial business also they will always be used in cases where there are no special conditions to be met. But if any account is not fully covered by the regular forms, the wise collection manager will not hesitate to discard the forms, and give special attention to the account. The man who is worth selling to and whose trade is worth retaining, is certainly worth the extra trouble required by this procedure.

Giving the collection letter the right tone

Whatever kind of letter is used—the form or the individual letter—the writer's first care is to give it the right tone—dignified and firm, yet considerate and friendly. Getting this right tone into the letter is largely a matter of getting the right viewpoint, and the right perspective on what your customer's relation and his obligation to you really are.

Regarding the debt as a strict business obligation

It is a mistake, in the first place, to look upon a just debt as anything but the strictest business obligation. The customer has bought the goods on certain terms, and has agreed to pay according to these terms. Therefore payment should not be asked for on any other ground than that it is justly due you in exchange for value received. If payment is placed on any other basis, the debtor is likely to regard it as a favor to you and not as an obligation; and any suggestion of this sort will be eagerly grasped by him as an excuse for evasion.

Especially bad is the practice of asking for payment on the ground that the firm is hard up:

We are going to be frank in telling you that we need the money. You are only one of a large number of our customers who are back on their accounts, and unless you remit at least a part of what you owe us, we may find ourselves in embarrassing circumstances.

The danger of the "hard up" plea

The moment you write a man like that you let him know that you are in the same class that he is, and you suggest to him a new excuse that he may not have used on you before. If you think it advisable to talk at all along this line, do it without losing your dignity.

But while it is necessary that you regard the debt as a strict business obligation, it is equally important that you consider the debtor first of all as a customer; that his friendly patronage be retained if it is possible to do so; and that he be granted any reasonable extensions in time that he may ask. A customer's trade is valuable to you until he has shown by a persistent ignoring of your requests for settlement that he cannot or does not intend to pay his bills voluntarily. Under those circumstances his business is not desirable to you in the future, and you are perfectly justified in making a sterner demand for settlement or in taking any legal steps that may seem necessary.

Considering the debtor as a customer

Keeping the customer's good will is a matter of selecting the proper arguments and using the right tone. It does not mean a weak-kneed collection policy or an apologetic attitude. It means making him see the fairness of your position and your readiness to give due consideration to his difficulties. The collection letter offers many opportunities for the use of little personal touches that give it the tone of friendly interest in the debtor's affairs. If you can make your letter show that, if you can make it convey the idea that you are interested in him and his welfare, as well as your own, you can insist upon payment without creating resentment. It is these intimate touches that get next to a man when mere formalities irritate and antagonize him.

Keeping the good will of the customer

Keeping in mind this matter of the correct attitude—

considering the payment as a business obligation, and retaining the good will of the customer—let us see what elements compose successful collection letters. Now it is well to remember that not all of these elements appear in every letter; but they represent proved methods of handling a number of situations with which the collection writer is constantly confronted. The completed letter will consist of the combination of these elements that will best meet the requirements of any given case.

The elements composing a collection letter

First element: notification of the standing of the account

The first is the notification of the standing of the account. This element appears in practically every collection letter, and usually forms the opening sentence or paragraph. It may be a very informal reminder, conveying the idea that failure to pay is due to a mere oversight; thus:

Dear Mr. Green:

You have been so busy making your preparations for the holiday trade, that you have doubtless overlooked the fact that your account with us is somewhat overdue. You have settled your bills promptly in the past, and we feel confident that this reminder will meet with an equally prompt remittance in this instance.

Starting with this very conciliatory reminder, the notification is made more and more emphatic with each succeeding letter of the collection series.

Forms of notification used in different letters

The following is from the second letter of a series:

The check you were to send me for $18.50, due on your bill of March 12th, has not arrived. No doubt you have overlooked the bill, or have it pigeon-holed for early settlement.

In this letter, an oversight is again suggested, but such a suggestion is usually far-fetched after the first letter has been unanswered.

This opening from a fourth letter is still more emphatic:

I have sent you frequent statements and letters about the $18.50 on your account, which is now two months past due. Yet you have not paid the account or even answered my letters.

After this introductory sentence or paragraph con-

taining the notification of how the account stands, the letter proceeds with the collection talk proper. This will vary with the different classes of debtors and with the position of the letter in the series. Naturally, you would not write the same to the good-pay and the bad-pay customer, and the arguments that are suitable for the second letter would not be the ones to use in the fourth.

The collection talk proper

Sometimes you have reason to believe that the debtor may have some valid reason which prevents immediate payment. He may be dissatisfied with the goods or with the treatment his order received, but has not sent in any complaint. Or he may be in temporary difficulty owing to sickness, to unexpected and unforeseeable local conditions which make his own collections slow, etc. If the customer is dissatisfied, the writer invites him to make his complaint known, and also seizes upon this opportunity to impress upon him the firm's desire always to give complete satisfaction to every customer. In the second case, the collection writer asks for a frank explanation, and declares the firm's willingness to make any reasonable arrangements to help him.

Second element: asking for explanation of non-payment

For example, this letter offers to clear up any dissatisfaction:

> If you have any cause for dissatisfaction with the contract, please inform us at once. It is better to clear up any misunderstanding at the outset than to allow the matter to drag, making your account troublesome to us and annoying to you.

Here is the way one correspondent handled a situation of the second sort:

> If there is any valid reason why you are unable to meet this obligation at the present time, let us know at once what it is. When we know just where you stand, some settlement satisfactory to us both can be made.

Third element: dealing with the customer's reply

When such inquiries are sent to the customer, your next procedure will depend upon the nature of his response. If he answers with some just complaint, and that is adjusted, the chances are that he will settle the bill and thus close the transaction. If he writes that

What to do if the explanation is satisfactory

he has met with temporary reverses that he could not have foreseen, the next step is to suggest some way out of the difficulty, such as to take his note with interest; to ask for part payment or payment in regular instalments; or to offer to take back the goods and cancel the bill.

A typical paragraph, offering one of these suggestions, follows:

> Since you are unable to pay the whole of your bill now, we will let you settle for the rest with your personal notes, bearing interest at 6%. Send us the $75 which you can pay now. For the remainder, $150, you can send us at the same time one note, payable in sixty days; or two notes equal in amount, payable respectively in thirty and sixty days; or three equal in amount, payable respectively in thirty, sixty and ninety days. Choose the plan which suits you best. This arrangement will help you over your present difficulty.

Procedure in case the explanation is not satisfactory

On the other hand, if the complaint was obviously trumped up to evade payment, if the difficulty was one which the customer could have guarded against, or if no response is made to the inquiry—then the collector will proceed with his efforts to force prompt and full payment. The same arguments will be used in this case as would be employed in a series where no inquiry was made concerning the reason for non-payment.

Fourth element: arguments for prompt payment

Various arguments or reasons for prompt payment are used. It is to be remembered that these must be in harmony with the general principle, already laid down, that payment should be asked for only on the ground that it is justly due in exchange for value received. The following arguments are all valid under this principle: "We wish to close our books for the month;" "prompt payment of bills enables us to offer lower prices, in the benefit of which each debtor shares;" "our finances are arranged on the assumption that the bills due us will be paid promptly;" "a large number of small unpaid accounts make a big total for one house to carry," etc.

Here is an example of the second argument:

> Prompt payment of bills by our customers makes it possible

for us to sell our goods more cheaply. When our money comes in regularly on the date due, we don't have to make an allowance for extra interest charges and add a percentage to all selling prices to cover the amount. You benefit by the low prices.

An illustration of the third argument:

A dignified "need the money" argument

As we arrange, as agreed with you, for monthly payments on our charge accounts, our finances are shaped to depend on payments every thirty days. Therefore we ask a settlement of this account.

Note the difference between the tone of these two letters and that of the one on p. 45. All three base their requests for payment on the fact that a business cannot be run without money; but the one on p. 45 is begging in tone, the other two are dignified and business-like.

Fifth element: personal appeals

Sometimes a more urgent, personal appeal is needed. One effective appeal is to the debtor's sense of fair play. For example, one firm writes:

Appeal to the debtor's sense of fair play

Reluctant as we are to believe that you would deliberately disregard a matter of this kind, we still feel that you are not according us proper treatment, in view of the many accommodations we have extended to you in the past.

Again, a manufacturer writes to a dealer:

If you realize that you have not paid for goods sold to you on sixty-day terms more than four months ago, we think you will concede that our treatment of your account has been exceedingly considerate, and that we are entitled to be paid without further delay, expense, or annoyance.

In both of these letters the argument is—We have been considerate of you, now you be fair to us. "Turn about is fair play."

Another appeal is to the debtor's pride—to his business or social standing, and the like; thus:

Appeal to the debtor's pride

Your continued neglect of this obligation leads us to one conclusion, but it is hard for us to believe that a man of your reputation and standing would attempt to evade payment of a just debt.

This also touches his pride:

When you ordered the merchandise you received from us, you gave your occupation as factory superintendent. A position of this kind should carry with it considerable personal responsibility. Yet, as we wrote you in our recent letter, the account you now have with our company has not been se''ed according to the contract.

Appeal that suggests the ill effects of non-payment

An appeal that will reach many debtors is one that suggests the bad effect of non-payment on their business, or, conversely, the good effect of prompt payment. In other words, it makes the man think of his own loss or gain. In this case, the suggestion of loss is usually more emphatic than that of gain, for the former plays upon his fear of the consequences which may follow his refusal to pay what he knows to be a just obligation. His guilty conscience—unless it is calloused by long misuse—will reinforce the appeal. The loss that is suggested may be refusal of future credit by our firm, the damage to his credit with other houses, the loss of financial standing in his community, and similar matters of vital importance to a business man.

Typical appeals of this class

One firm writes:

> You want to keep your credit perfectly clear. The only sure way to do this, as you well know, is to pay your bills promptly as they fall due. Any delay is liable to cause a bad impression, which you will find very difficult to get rid of later on.

Another firm uses this:

> We desire to effect a settlement of this account in an easy and amicable way. Giving publicity to it would not help us any, but it would certainly bring discredit to you among your friends and neighbors.

This last letter contains not only an appeal to his loss in his business relations, but also one to his personal pride.

Appeal based on avoiding annoyance and trouble

Then, again, the suggestion may be made that by paying he can save himself annoyance and trouble. This may be the annoyance of getting more "dunning" letters, or the trouble and expense of a lawsuit. For example, in one of the earlier letters of a series, one house uses this appeal:

> I not only wish to save myself the trouble of forwarding another statement, but I am quite as anxious to save you the annoyance of receiving another reminder.

In the final letter of a series, this suggestion becomes a definite statement that legal proceedings will be promptly begun; as:

This is our final notice, and should we fail to hear from you within ten days, the matter will be placed with our attorneys with instructions to take any action necessary to effect a quick settlement.

The appeals just enumerated are the ones most commonly used. They are based upon a sound knowledge of human nature and have been proved by tests to be effective. The list, however, is by no means complete. Each business man can add to it other appeals which his experience has proved will reach his class of customers.

Sixth element: request to "do it now"

Another element of the collection letter is that which urges the debtor "to do it now," to pay up at once. Some writers content themselves with an urgent request for prompt payment; as, "Please give this matter your immediate attention;" or "Send us your check or money order today." Others go further and suggest some means for making the act of paying easy; for example, "Don't bother to write a letter. Just pin your check to this note and mail it to me." Another encloses a blank check and writes: "Simply sign the enclosed check and mail it to us. I have already filled it out for the right sum."

Making it easy to pay

These "easy-to-pay" methods have the advantage of minimizing the actual physical effort needed to make the payment. They are effective because they forestall man's inclination to put off a task unless it is made very easy to do. In this respect the collection writer has taken over one of the devices of the advertisement and sales letter writers, who have long recognized that the return coupon and the return post card are among their most valuable aids in getting returns.

Seventh element: sales talk

There remains for discussion one other element of the collection letter—sales talk. Sometimes in the earlier letters of a series, after the customer has been reminded that his account is overdue, the writer, apparently forgetting that this is a collection letter, calls his attention to a new line of goods or intimates that an order from

him would be welcome. The object of introducing this sales talk into a collection letter is partly, of course, to secure further orders, but it is not primarily that. The chief purpose is to give the impression that the writer has no other thought than that the account will be settled promptly, and that he regards the customer as one of the firm's most valued friends. This expression of confidence will bring many debtors into line for prompt payment. It is a subtle and effective appeal to their pride.

A collection letter that is a sales letter

Dear Sir:

Perhaps you will be interested to know that our "Maryland Titbits" have received such an enthusiastic reception and have proved so satisfactory that over 38% of our first customers have re-ordered. That speaks well for our goods, doesn't it?

I am glad to know that you, too, were pleased with the cigars sent you some days ago, and I suppose you have smoked quite a number by this time, as you have not returned the box.

In accordance with the terms of our offer, I am enclosing the bill. I will much appreciate your early remittance. Why not send along an order for another box with your check?

Yours very truly,

This letter was signed in ink by the president of the company distributing the cigars. It proved an unusually successful first collection letter. It is really a sales letter.

Let us now see how these elements may be arranged in a series of six collection letters. For convenience and definiteness of reference the principal elements are here summarized and numbered:

Summary of elements in a collection letter

I. Notification of the standing of the account.

II. Request for debtor's reasons for failure or inability to pay: 1, dissatisfaction with the goods or with the company's handling of his order; 2, sickness, temporary financial difficulty, etc.

III. Adjustment of the complaint, or suggestions of ways out of his difficulty.

IV. Various arguments or reasons for prompt payment.

V. More urgent personal appeals: 1, to the debtor's sense of fair play; 2, to his pride in his busi-

ness or social reputation; 3, to the bad effect of non-payment on his credit standing; 4, to his desire to save himself annoyance and trouble.

VI. Direct request for prompt payment.

VII. Sales talk.

Analysis of a series of collection letters—general

In the series shown on pages 54 to 56, the debtor makes no reply to the company's request for a statement of his reasons for not paying; consequently, the elements marked III—which are in answer to these reasons—do not appear in the series. Likewise, IV is not found, for the writer of the letter devotes himself to the more urgent personal appeals, marked V. As was stated before, not all the elements necessarily, or even usually, appear in every letter or every series.

The first letter

In the first letter, the notification of the standing of the account (I) contains the suggestion that non-payment may be due to a misunderstanding of the plan of payment expected by the company. The letter then explains the plan; asks for the cooperation of the customer in carrying it out; and also assures him that if it becomes impossible for him to pay on the agreed dates, the company is willing to make the necessary arrangements. Since the letter assumes that the failure to pay is the result merely of a misunderstanding, none of the formal appeals for payment are used. The letter, as is usually the case with the first letter of a series, is intended chiefly to serve as a reminder.

In the fourth paragraph, sales value (VII) is given to the letter by the offer of the use of the free service departments.

The letter ends with a request for payment (VI).

The second letter

The second letter opens with a stronger statement of the standing of the account (I), which occupies the first two paragraphs.

The third paragraph makes appeals to the customer's sense of fair play (V, 1) and to his pride (V, 2): the first, by reminding him that the company has made

Dear Sir:

Suggests a definite collection policy

Whenever one of our customers does not promptly remit his first payment under our contract with him, his account is automatically referred to me. Your account has now run behind for two weeks. Often, in handling accounts called to my attention, I find that customers have misunderstood or been somewhat confused as to how payments are to be made. Perhaps you have done so.

Don't wait for a statement

While as a reminder only we send out our statements shortly before payments are due, you need not wait for these, as by chance they may be delayed or fail to reach you. So send in your payment when it is due, and you will receive prompt credit and acknowledgment.

Makes payment dates adjustable under emergency conditions

I would like also to ask your cooperation in regard to your payments -- that is, that you write me if at any time it is impossible for you to make your payments on the date on which we agreed. This will prevent the possibility of any misunderstanding.

Retains the debtor's good will

Enclosed you will find an outline of our various service departments. These services are offered to you free. Use them regularly.

Will you put your remittance in the enclosed envelope and mail it today?

Yours very truly,

THE FIRST LETTER

This is the first letter of an actual collection letter series. The remaining letters are shown on pages 55 and 56. The first letter is only a notification of the standing of the account. The second letter is a stronger statement of the standing of the account and courteously asks for immediate payment. The third letter seeks chiefly for some explanation for the delay. The fourth letter is more insistent and peremptory than the preceding letters. The fifth letter carries a note of finality and exhausted patience. The sixth letter (not shown) is merely a notice of legal action for which the debtor alone is responsible.

Dear Sir:

You have disappointed me. I expected a reply to my recent letter regarding payment on your account, but none has come.

Touches debtor's pride gently

It is now almost thirty days since payment was due. Your next payment matures in a few days, and I am sure you want to keep your account in good standing.

We have granted you a long period of credit, broken into monthly payments, because we appreciated the fact that this would make it easier for you to do business and because we were confident that, especially under such conditions, responsible men are careful to maintain their credit.

Will you not send us your check while this letter is still fresh in your mind? Or at least write to me that I may have a correct understanding of the situation; this will permit your account to be handled in a satisfactory manner.

A fair request plainly stated

Yours truly,

THE SECOND LETTER

Dear Sir:

Are you ill? Have you been absent from home? Has some unfortunate circumstance overtaken you?

Offers an opportunity for explanation

Perhaps there is some unusual condition which has prevented you from answering my letters or making your payments.

I am rather of the opinion, however, that you have had the matter fully in mind, but have simply neglected it from day to day, intending to forward your payment, but never quite "getting around to it."

At any rate, I would appreciate it greatly if you would give this account your prompt attention NOW. Then you, too, will feel better.

A firm ending which does not arouse resentment

Yours truly,

THE THIRD LETTER

Another chance to explain and an appeal for square dealing

Dear Sir:

Have you any cause for complaint as to the handling of your account since becoming one of our customers? If so, will you write at once?

I have tried to handle your account in a manner fair to you and to this company. I seem to have failed. At least you paid no attention to my letters and are letting your account become seriously delinquent.

It is not fair to either of us to compel me to write again and again.

The spirit of the golden rule is strong within us all, however, and I believe you will use the enclosed envelope to mail either your check for the two payments now due or a frank letter explaining why you have not paid.

Sincerely yours,

THE FOURTH LETTER

Last chance to explain.

Creditor insistent and patience waning

Dear Sir:

If you are an honorable man, you will make payment on your account or mail us an explanation immediately. We have called your attention to this account several times. You have not answered.

We accepted your contract, believing you responsible and honorable. We have done our part. You have not done yours. What shall we believe now?

Yours very truly,

THE FIFTH LETTER

liberal terms in order to make payment easier for him; the second, by the assumption that he is one of the class of responsible business men who are careful about maintaining their credit.

The closing paragraph courteously asks for immediate payment (VI); or at least for some explanation (II) which will give the company a correct understanding of the customer's intentions. This request is made a general one; the third letter asks specifically for the reasons classified as II, 2, the fourth, for those classified as II, 1.

The third letter

In the third letter, the notification of the standing of the account (1) is made rather incidentally in the second paragraph.

The letter begins with specific questions intended to find out whether the man is in trouble (II, 2)—whether unusual conditions prevent his paying. These give him an opportunity to explain his inability to pay, and open the way for the making of some arrangement to meet the new conditions, such as those discussed under III. (As no reply is received to this request, there is, of course, no opportunity, later, to make this arrangement.)

The third paragraph asserts the company's belief that the customer fully intends to pay, and has been merely putting off the matter until a more convenient time.

The last paragraph asks that prompt attention be given to the account (VI).

In this letter remittance is not asked for directly, although the customer is made to understand that it would, of course, be welcomed. The emphasis is on getting some explanation for the delay.

The fourth letter

In the fourth letter the standing of the account (I) is given in the second paragraph.

The letter first asks if the customer has any cause for complaint about the company's manner of handling his account (II, 1; the previous letter has emphasized II, 2).

The rest of the letter plays upon the customer's sense

of fair play (V, 1). In fact, this is the appeal that is featured throughout the letter.

The tone of the letter is more insistent and peremptory than that of the preceding members of the series.

The fifth letter

The fifth letter prepares the way for the final letter, which gives notice of legal action. This one is chiefly a concise statement of the present status of the account (I). It sums up the results of the company's effort to collect the money: the company has made every reasonable offer; the customer has paid no attention. What can the company think about him now? It is going to give him one more chance, however, to show that he is an honorable man (appeal to his pride, V, 2).

Short, crisp sentences are used to give the note of finality, of patience almost exhausted.

The sixth letter

The sixth, and last, letter of the series is a notice that the account will be turned over to an attorney, if it is not settled within ten days (the extreme form of V, 4). The customer's persistent ignoring of the previous letters has left the company no alternative; this action is forced upon it by his own neglect.

Analysis of the series according to the principles of right attitude

Now analyze the series according to the two principles laid down in the preceding part of the chapter (pp. 44-46). Throughout, the series treats the debt as a strict business obligation; nowhere is there a hint given that payment is demanded on any other ground than that it is justly due the company.

Also, the customer is treated with the greatest consideration; the writer of the series never loses sight of the fact that he is addressing a customer whose good will is to be retained, and whose future patronage is to be secured. Let us see more particularly how this principle is carried out:

The first four letters assert the firm's willingness to do everything in its power to help him. The first one offers to change the time of payment if the original

arrangement is inconvenient. The second asks in a general way for any explanation that will enable the company to make some arrangement whereby the account can be handled satisfactorily to both parties in the contract. The third specifically inquires whether the nonpayment is due to sickness or other unforeseen difficulties; and implies that, if such is the case, the company is ready to help him out of the difficulty. The fourth suggests that perhaps the company has not handled the order satisfactorily; if so, the debtor has but to make known his complaint, and the company will correct the mistake.

Use of the principles in the different letters of the series

Beyond these four letters it is useless for the writer to ignore the suspicion that the customer probably does not intend to pay; and consequently, keeping his good will is no longer so important a matter. Even in the last two letters, however, the writer continues to emphasize the company's desire to be fair, and puts the blame for any harsh procedure squarely upon the debtor himself.

After receiving such a series, a man could hardly fail to be impressed with the company's fairness and willingness to help him. He would be unreasonable indeed if he felt any ill will toward the house that was so considerate. Yet in the letters there is no hint of weakness or indecision.

The effect of such a series

CHAPTER VI

WHAT A SALES LETTER MUST DO

The principles of salesmanship in a sales letter

THERE are certain basic principles upon which every successful sales letter must be built, certain elements which it must contain. If it is to take the place of a salesman and do what a good salesman would do, it must follow a definite line of procedure in making a written sale just as he does in making a personal one. It must win for itself an audience with the prospective customer; and once that is gained, it must follow the steps of the sale exactly as the salesman does when he talks face to face with his prospect, leading him gradually, tactfully, through certain definite processes up to the actual signing of the order.

Careful selection of ideas and logical arrangement are necessary

For this reason every sentence and paragraph that goes into one of your letters should have a reason for being there. The sole aim of a letter is to get action, and non-essentials simply detract from its directness. You have no time to write them, nor has your prospect time to read them.

It is the easiest thing in the world to write a letter that goes rambling from one topic to another without getting anywhere in particular. But the good letter writer has a definite end in mind, and he goes straight to it over a definite route.

Planning the sales letter

Go about the writing of a letter as you would the preparation of an important speech. There are a thousand things you might say, but only a few, perhaps ten, are vital. Think of as many as you can to begin with; then sift them to the few. Confine yourself to those points and drive them home, knowing the effect that each should have and its relation to the end you want to reach.

Consider now the good sales letter. It proceeds through certain steps, which are based logically upon the principles of salesmanship. It contains:

The order-getting elements in a sales letter

1. The opening, which wins the reader's attention and interest, and prompts him to go farther into the letter.

2. Description and explanation, which increase his interest by picturing the proposition in his mind.

3. Proof, which convinces the reader of the quality of the article you have to sell, and shows him how other men have profited by its use.

4. Persuasion, which draws the reader to your way of thinking by showing the adaptation of the article to his needs.

5. Inducement, which gives him a particular or extra reason for buying now.

6. The climax or clincher, which makes it easy for the reader to order, and prompts him to act at once.

These elements are based on the salesman's talk

Take these elements up one by one, and compare them with cross-sections of a good salesman's selling talk. You will be surprised to find how closely the parallelism follows and how simple a proposition it is to write a good sales letter, after all, once you learn that it is merely a matter of talking to your man on paper.

Getting attention

First, you must get the attention of the reader. You may do this in a number of ways—by an opening sentence or paragraph, for instance, that arouses his curiosity, or by a striking statement that hits some one of his own problems, difficulties, or desires. This initial

Dear Sir:

Attention and interest

Your Christmas tree is waiting for you out here on my farm at Kinsvale. Don't you want your evergreens and tree brought straight to your fireside from the woods?

Description and explanation

I have a number of straight, bushy little hemlock and pine trees ranging from 3 to 8 feet in height. They will make splendid Christmas trees. Many smaller ones are suitable for table decoration. Wreaths will be made of hemlock, juniper, and evergreen, 12 and 18 inches in diameter. They will be carefully and firmly woven, with plenty of cones and abundant material.

Proof

You cannot buy fresher and better trees, wreaths, and greenery than these. I have inquired the prices of florists and dealers in the city, and find that I can deliver them much cheaper than you can get them in town. Read the enclosed list of comparative prices.

Persuasion

Will it not make your Christmas merrier, if the wreaths, the tree, and festoons, are greener, less broken, fresher, and more fragrant than those cut a week earlier, and shipped into town by freight?

Inducement

Drive over, pick out your tree, tag it, if you wish. I'll cut it down. I will also mount the smaller trees, if you desire, on wooden bases. My prices cover delivery to your door. All orders must be received by Dec. 21. Don't bother to send money. In case of my regular customers for farm products, sales will be charged to their monthly accounts.

Closing—climax and clincher

Remember, I can fill only the earliest orders received. Fill in the enclosed postal order blank and mail it today.

Yours truly,

THE SIX ELEMENTS IN A SALES LETTER

Here is an actual letter, used by a nursery man in handling his Christmas business, that is almost a model in logically presenting every element of salesmanship. From the beginning that compels attention straight through to the urgent close, the reader is led step by step to a definite desire to buy.

interest on the part of the man addressed is absolutely essential to the success of the letter. No matter how well your proposition may be stated in the body of the letter, or how strong your close, your efforts will be lost if the opening does not start the man reading.

Describing the article or explaining the proposition

Following this attention-winning opening, the good letter runs directly into the description and explanation. This part must be above all specific. Every salesman knows the value of the actual demonstration—of having his goods on the ground, so that the prospect can see and feel and understand. As a letter writer you cannot show your goods: you must depend on description. Give your man a definite idea of what you have to offer. Picture the article, its use, its advantages, so vividly that it swims before his mental eye.

Proving your statements

Proof follows logically after description. The salesman doesn't expect the buyer to take his word for the quality of his goods; he hands out his samples for examination. Then he tells how Mr. So and So in the next town has been selling or using the goods for years and has just given him another large order. Similarly, in the sales letter it is not enough to give the reader your unsupported description of the article or explanation of what it will do. You must reinforce your statements by definite proof of their truth. This you may do by some novel demonstration of the quality of the goods, or by showing the satisfaction which they have given other buyers.

Persuading the prospect to buy

Persuasion intensifies the desire that has been awakened by the proof. Proof has demonstrated to the reader how the article has helped other men, and has thus suggested to him that he also may be benefited by it; that is, proof has created a latent desire for it. Persuasion turns this latent desire into an active buying force by showing the reader definitely how the article will help him personally. Persuasion brings the article into relation with his own needs and interests, just as the skilful

My dear Sir:

Opportunity comes to a man's door only once. He must be prepared when it knocks at his door, and answer "ready," otherwise he is largely a failure; a drudge, trudging along daily on a mere pittance, awaiting the end, with no one but himself to blame.

Use of worn-out figure

Get out of the rut and into a field of greater knowledge, and thus be prepared to command, yea even insure a larger income. Business men are coming to recognize the value of a better knowledge of existing conditions, of organization and systematization. The factory expert may safely without fear of contradiction be said to be the Business Adviser of today. He assists in the organizing of a business, and much if not the greater part of the success of the manufacturer must be attributed to the wisdom and grasp of the business foresight of the accountant.

Too general

But it is no longer necessary for you to depend upon an outsider for help in organizing and conducting your business. Here is your opportunity to become an expert yourself at a nominal cost. Fill out your order and get our book just published on "Factory Organization." This book has been completely rewritten

Directness entirely lacking

Our prospectus fully explains the scope of the work and qualifications of the writer. Any further information desired will be cheerfully given on request. This is your only opportunity to take advantage of a special offering. Will you grasp it? Act at once! Awaiting the courtesy of a reply, we are

No explanation or argument

Offer not clear

Very truly yours,

Weak close

A LETTER LACKING IN DIRECTNESS AND APPEAL

This letter is so full of generalities, and so lacking in personality that it entirely misses the individual appeal. The proposition offered is not mentioned until the third paragraph and then in an incidental way only. Despite the interrogation and exclamation points in the last paragraph, the close is weak.

My dear Mr. Colby:

This morning I received from our printers some news that I feel certain will be of interest to you. And because this is a matter of importance, may I hear from you and have the benefit of your opinion before any public announcement is made?

Personal opening arouses confidence

I will receive from our printers Thursday a few advance copies of C. P. Watson's "Factory Organization"— a business book that I believe will save you more DOLLARS than any other book in print.

Explanation

We have issued no printed matter about "Factory Organization." But even a VOLUME of printed matter could not show you its value as will the book itself. I do not expect you to BUY it blindly. I merely want you to look it over at MY RISK and give me your frank opinion of it.

Proof

YOU WOULD WILLINGLY RISK A DOZEN TIMES $2.00 for a SINGLE plan that would reduce your factory costs ALONE. Yet this book contains 22 money saving plans that will reduce expenses throughout your whole business—plans of hiring and handling employees—plans that will check every leak and waste in your factory and office.

Persuasion and explanation

Merely send for the book on approval. The $2.00 you forward will not be regarded as a remittance but as a deposit. And if ANY SINGLE CHAPTER alone is not worth $5.00 CASH to you, I will remit you in all $2.10 to pay you in addition for your postage.

Proof, persuasion, and inducement.

Merely pin a $2.00 bill to this letter —mail tonight if possible—and use the envelope enclosed.

Clincher

Yours very truly,

THE SAME PROPOSITION IN MAN-TO-MAN TALK

Note how the book proposition in the letter on the opposite page is handled in this rewritten letter—as personal as a call over the phone. Proverbs and axioms are replaced by reasons why the chance to buy is worth real cash to the particular reader every hour of his factory day.

salesman makes his sales talk fit the individual needs of each buyer.

Offering an inducement

There is another thing which the letter as well as the salesman must do—offer a specific inducement. You know how the clever salesman manipulates his talking points. Always he holds back till the last some extra reason why you should accept his proposition without delay. This is the part that inducement plays in the letter. As you hesitate, undecided whether or not to order, the shrewd sales-writer shoots at you one last advantage which he has held in reserve, and with which he hopes to induce you to act now.

Making it easy to order

And, you will also recall, the salesman follows up his talk immediately by placing before you an order blank ready for your signature. He has learned the secret of making it easy to order. And that is what you, too, must do in your business-getting letter: follow up your last inducement and your "Act today" by giving the man something to sign—a post card, a coupon, something that is ready to return. Make what he is to do so plain to him that there can be no possible misunderstanding. Say it in so many words—"You do this and we will do that." Aim to make your climax so direct, so strong and simple that the reader cannot resist the temptation to reply.

These elements illustrated in a typical letter

To illustrate the use of this outline, take, for example, the letter on page 62, an actual business letter that was successful in selling a great many Christmas trees and wreaths by mail. Note what an analysis of its make-up reveals, how it leads step by step to its climax.

Here attention is won through a striking opening assertion that must arouse the curiosity of the reader. Then the letter runs quickly into explanation. Proof is found in the frank discussion of prices and in the enclosed price list, which the reader may test for accuracy in his local store. The next paragraph persuades through suggesting how the goods will make Christmas

merrier. Then follows inducement in the opportunity to pick out one's tree, and the offer of a free wooden base and free delivery. Finally the climax comes in the last urgent suggestion to act at once because the number is limited. And how could ordering be made easier? "Don't bother to send money." Simply "Fill in the enclosed postal order blank and mail it today."

Note the inducement and climax

Of course, not all letters have the elements marked off so clearly as this, or arranged in just this order. Various combinations and proportions are employed to fit various conditions. Your choice of the form to use will depend upon your knowledge of what will win the reader's interest. But the finished letter contains, in some degree, every one of these elements.

On page 64 is shown a letter which is lacking in many of the elements that make a good sales letter. On page 65 is the same letter rewritten.

Another element which is sometimes called "the whip" appears in many letters. It is generally a short paragraph usually consisting of a single line, intended to summarize pointedly what has gone before, or to whet the prospect's curiosity, or retain his interest, or surprise him with an inducement, or suggest a definite action. Some examples are: "Why?", "Here's the big idea.", "Now, what do you think of this?", "But the book is free.", "Yes, it will pay." (See pages 121, 122, 125). The effect of the "whip" may be either physical or psychological; that is, it may serve as a rest period between paragraphs, or urge the prospect to the action desired. Both effects are sometimes obtained in a "whip."

"The whip"

The only sure method of learning the functions, value, and proper use of these elements, is to study each one individually. Then, with an appreciation of the effect of each upon the reader, you can build a balanced business letter that will bring results.

Study the elements in the following chapters

CHAPTER VII

GETTING ATTENTION AND AROUSING INTEREST

Arousing interest in the first few words

"GET your reader safely past the first six words, and his attention is yours"—thus one experienced correspondent sums up the importance of the opening sentence of a sales letter. "The first few words," he continues, "whet or deaden curiosity. Judged by them, the letter is either quickly condemned to the forgotten heap beneath the desk, or else approved for further consideration." And he is right. A bad start will kill an otherwise passable sales letter.

What is a bad start? It is one that does not nail attention with the first phrase, that does not turn this attention to vital, personal interest.

Get attention—the successful beginning must first do that. But attention may be momentary, transient. It must be converted into lasting, compelling interest if you are to bring your reader into a receptive attitude toward the remainder of your letter and the proposition that it presents (page 71).

Problem of beginning—in two classes of letters

The problem of getting attention and arousing interest varies with the two classes of sales letters: those in answer to an inquiry, and the unsolicited letter. In the first class the attention and interest of the reader are, to a certain extent, assured, and the writer's care

is not to kill his interest, and also to stimulate it. In the second class the attention of the reader must be secured and his interest aroused.

In first class, avoid stereotyped acknowledgments

For the first class a single caution will be sufficient. In answering an inquiry do not begin with a stereotyped acknowledgment of the receipt of the inquiry. You only deaden the reader's interest—you certainly cannot stimulate it—by starting out in the old common-place way: "I have the honor to inform you," or "In reply to yours of the 18th I beg to state." There is no particular honor involved in informing me and no reason on earth why a man should "beg to state" something I have asked him. A business man told me that he got so sick of "begging" letters that he fired them all into the waste-basket. Equally bad is, "Your esteemed favor of the 15th is at hand, and in reply I would say." The beginning of the letter—the part from which the reader gets his first impression—is too important for such meaningless formalities.

Begin directly and naturally

Why not begin directly and naturally? When I write for a catalogue for example, why should a man begin his letter in reply with a preamble like this:

> Answering your recent favor addressed to our office, we wish to state that under separate cover we are mailing you a copy of our 1916 catalogue and trust you may find such a lamp as you require illustrated therein.

Why not break right in:

> The catalogue you asked for the other day is going to you in this mail, and we are so confident that you will find listed in it just the kind of lamp you need that we want you to go through it very carefully. The lamps listed on pages 25 and 29 are intended for use under such conditions as you described in your letter,—etc.

Formal vs. personal beginning

What's the difference? The first is entirely formal and impersonal. I feel that the writer has looked upon my inquiry as only one of a thousand, and that he has no particular interest in helping me to get what I want. Why, then, should I be interested in his letter? The second is direct and personal. I feel that this letter

is really written to me and that the writer wants to help me. Of course I'll read his letter.

Equally successful are the following:

A successful beginning—personal and natural

We are pleased to get your request for information about our improved gas range, and a copy of our catalogue goes forward by today's mail.

Your attention is particularly called to the descriptive matter on pages 3 to 9 inclusive,—etc.

And also:

The catalogue for which you wrote is too large to enclose with this letter, and so you will get it in another envelope. You will find on page 4 a complete description of the 1916 Model, Smith Calculator,—etc.

These are direct and personal, and lead the reader naturally into the description of the article.

Second class: getting attention by the use of the display head

In letters of the second class—the unsolicited sales letters—some successful writers begin with a display head, consisting of a short phrase or sentence, printed in capitals or underlined, thus:

CUT YOUR COAL BILLS IN HALF.
THIS MEANS MONEY TO YOU—BIG MONEY.
FIRE TWO OF YOUR CLERKS.

This plan is based upon successful advertising practice. It is to a sales letter what a catch-line is to an advertisement. You summarize the most striking feature of your proposition in the smallest possible number of words, and hurl them at your prospective buyer with all the emphasis at your command.

An admirable example of this scheme was the letter of a magazine publisher addressed to subscribers from whom renewals of subscriptions were being solicited. The letter opened with the single word—"EXPIRED!" Very few of those who received that letter failed to read further to learn who, or what, had expired.

Advantages of the display head

The advantage of the display-line opening is that it virtually compels the reader to continue into the second paragraph of your letter. Used with discretion, the idea is excellent. It makes the reader sit up. The human

Dear Mr. Burke:

Attention

You wouldn't think of throwing away your fountain pen simply because the ink is exhausted.

Interest and explanation

Then why throw away your worn duplicating machine ribbons? We can re-ink them as well as you can fill your fountain pen.

Proof and explanation

If you will examine one of your apparently worthless ribbons, you will find that the fabric is scarcely worn at all. We take these, treat them with our special process, refill them with ink, and return them to you practically new ribbons and for only one-half the cost.

Proof, persuasion, and inducement

Read the enclosed folder — it explains our proposition fully. But a trial will convince you. And the sooner you send them, the more money you'll save.

Clincher

Why not pack them up, put on the enclosed shipping label, and send them along right now?

Yours very truly,

TWO WAYS OF WINNING ATTENTION

In this sales letter all the elements of salesmanship are present, yet they are so cleverly interwoven that the letter stands, first of all, as a unit. Attention is won through a combination of two methods of opening a letter—use of the word "you" and a direct unusual statement.

Psychology of the display head

mind is so constructed that it requires a positive and conscious mental effort to turn aside from any thing which has aroused curiosity. The normal operation of the mind is to satisfy that curiosity, even though the reader's cold reason tells him that he is not likely to be interested.

One disadvantage, in the opinion of some correspondents, is that the display head suggests a form letter. These writers prefer some other method which gives them an opportunity at the beginning to give their letter more of the tone of a personal communication.

Disadvantages of the display head

Another danger is that this spectacular device may arouse a degree of attention which the merit of your proposition does not justify. This style of opening is like the catch-line of an advertisement or the head line of a newspaper article. The ad-writer who shrieks "Prices Slaughtered" and then lists staple goods at prevailing prices misses fire. The newspaper which habitually employs lurid headlines and six-inch type to set forth the ordinary doings of a dull day has nothing in reserve when an event warranting the spread eagle scream line occurs. The method is one to use sparingly, and only when other means fail.

The "irritating" display head

The display head which is intended to secure attention by "irritating" the reader is especially dangerous. However, it is sometimes used with good effect. Here is an example from a letter written by a collection agency. This concern had a series of form letters designed to facilitate collections, and the circular letter through which it brought the proposition to the attention of possible clients opened:

"YOU DO NOT PAY YOUR BILLS PROMPTLY, SIR!"

Naturally, the man who received such a slap in the face did not toss the letter aside without learning more, and when he did read on, he found that he had no reason

to be offended. The letter was written, not to the man who did not pay his debts, but to firms whose business it was to deal with such men; and it hit upon the problem that they were constantly trying to solve.

This form is to be used with caution

But this "irritating" device must be used with caution. It does impel the reader to go further into the letter, but in the hands of an inexperienced or untactful writer, it is likely to arouse resentment that the remainder of the letter will not remove, no matter how attractive a proposition it presents. If you feel that you must employ this means to get a man's attention, be sure that you remove the sting before you close the letter. Prejudiced readers are not often buyers.

A modified type of display head

Some writers use a modified form of the display head. Their first sentence is short and emphatic, but it is not in capitals or underlined. It is made a part of the body of the letter. Here are some examples:

"Pay-day—what does it mean to you?"

"Does your money 'go 'round'? Or does it fail to stop all the gaps made by last week's bills?"

"You've got to have more money!"

This method has most of the appeal of the complete display head without the latter's suggestion of the "Yellow Journal."

The best form for the introductory sentence

What form is best for this short opening sentence, used either as a regular display head or incorporated in the body of the letter? Some writers prefer the direct command, others the question, and still others the declarative form. The direct command demands attention, but may easily be made too peremptory and dictatorial. The question is more intimate; it suggests a greater degree of personal interest in the reader's needs. The declarative form is perhaps more natural than either of the others, but, in the opinion of some correspondents, is less forceful. All have been used successfully. The choice will depend upon the inclination of the individual writer.

The difference between getting attention and arousing interest

Thus far we have been discussing one function of the beginning of a sales letter—getting attention. But, as we learned in the first part of this chapter, the beginning must do more. It is easy enough to attract attention; the rub comes when you endeavor to vitalize that attention into personal, undivided interest. The first is often only a trick of words. Cry "Stop!" and every man within hearing will turn to your call. But the next word uttered must make its personal appeal or the attention gained is lost. And attention lost is a double loss, for a man once tricked into pausing to hear something of no interest will not be tricked again.

Combining the attention and interest-getting features

Hence, the means employed for getting attention in a letter must either be followed up by some method of arousing interest, or be combined with it. Many correspondents prefer to combine the two elements. They dispense with the special attention-getting device—the display head or the short, pithy opening sentence—and start in directly with some subject of interest to the prospective buyer. They aim to secure attention and arouse interest at the same time. Note how effectively this method is used in the following letter addressed to bankers:

Dear Mr. Hunt:

There's a bank here in Chicago—not much larger than yours—that secured over 280 new savings depositors last month! And secured them, mind you, on the sole strength of business-getting circular letters—without the aid of a single personal solicitor.

That's why this letter is as vital to you as though it were a certified check. For it tells about,—etc.

Such a letter gives greater opportunity for an easy personal beginning, and has less suggestion of the form letter than one starting with a display head.

Arousing interest: specific methods

Let us turn now to specific methods for arousing interest. These methods are numberless, and only a few illustrations can be given here. They will suggest others which will meet the needs of any particular business. Sometimes they are used in connection with the display head; sometimes they dispense with it.

Dear Mr. Benson:

You believe in protecting your home from fire, don't you? But how about protecting it from the other elements? — *Intimate question wins attention*

The next time it rains, your roof may leak, your ceilings may be water-soaked, and some of the choicest and most valued contents of your home damaged beyond repair. — *Interest and persuasion*

You have often seen poorly constructed roofs allowing the rain to beat in. But it isn't necessary for you to run this risk. For at no more than what ordinary roofs cost, you can get absolute protection — in Flintoid. Here is a roofing that will withstand year in and year out the most severe weather conditions. — *Persuasion and explanation*

Flintoid is made of the very best of raw materials. It is laid in three layers over the entire surface. Over that goes a red coating that is absolutely unaffected by heat, cold, or dampness. — *Explanation*

Just sit down for a moment and figure up how long it has been since your roof was put on. Can you trust longer to its doubtful protective qualities? Flintoid can be laid right over the old roof, as the booklet shows. The cost includes nails and cement — and we pay the freight. — *Persuasion, explanation, and inducement*

Simply fill in the dimensions of your roof on the enclosed order blank, sign and mail today. — *Clincher*

Very truly yours,

HOLDING INTEREST TO THE END

This letter is a good example of interest won and held from beginning to end. Almost every paragraph contains explanation, cleverly combined with other elements. The proof is given in the enclosed booklet; convincing persuasion appears in three paragraphs; and inducement follows.

The human interest story: its universal appeal

A common device is the "human interest story"—one dealing with primitive passions, the incidents of which are common experiences. Your wash-woman and the heiress at boarding school, your office boy and the director of a great railway, are equally, though perhaps differently, affected by it. It deals with fundamentals. It ignores non-essentials. Human interest it is which packs the playhouse, which makes possible a penny press, which sells millions of magazines. Properly handled, it may be made the basis of nine-tenths of your successful sales letters.

Using human interest in a letter to mothers

Let us suppose we are writing to a woman on the subject of boy's clothing. As this is a subject which lends itself readily to the display line opening described in the first part of this chapter, we will use it, thus:

Dear Mrs. Myers:

ABOUT THAT BOY OF YOURS—

We have her attention; of that there can be no doubt, for the boy is the most interesting subject in the world to his mother, whether he be an effeminate little bookworm or the neighborhood terror. Now what statement can we next make to turn that attention into interest and lead naturally to our proposition? What little fact of human nature will open her mind, enlist her sympathy, gain her confidence, and bring her to look at our proposition from the right standpoint?

Note the mingling of humor and sympathy

He is arriving at the age when his spirit of manliness asserts itself. You find him imitating his father's manners—he is using your embroidery scissors to shave with—he is no longer ambitious to be a policeman, but has his eye on the Presidency. Among the serious problems with him today is this: he is beginning to want manly, square-cut, "grown-up" clothes. He is no longer satisfied with ordinary boys' clothes. He wants something "like father's."

This is human interest. We touch upon that pathetically humorous period of transformation between childhood and youth in order that we may bring our reader to approach the subject of her boy's clothes from the boy's own viewpoint.

Again, a maker of eye-wash might say:

An appeal to fear is always strong

Dear Sir:

Trouble with your eyes?

Ten thousand people went blind last year in New York State alone. Over 1,000,000 pairs of eye-glasses were sold. Are your eyes in danger?

Here we appeal to fear.

A letter with the following opening paragraph was sent out by a retail meat market:

Dear Sir:

An appeal to the appetite

Some evening when you feel as though nothing would please you more than a nice thick steak or a couple of choice chops, drop around to THE T & G, and you'll be able to take home a steak or chops that will make your mouth water when they come from the griddle.

An appeal to the palate—a suggestion of an appetizing dinner—this will interest most of us.

Similarly appeals to health may form the basis of interest in letters written by makers of patent medicines. Clothing and shoe houses may appeal to comfort and style; business schools to ambition; and so on with the countless other universal human tastes and instincts.

Various human-interest appeals

The news story is another means of arousing interest. The opening of the Panama Canal, the Great War, some bit of local news or trade news—all these are points of contact with the reader's interest. For an example we may take a letter written by a manufacturer of an electric motor-controlling device:

Dear Sir:

I was on board the U. S. Monitor "Florida" when she was hit by a Whitehead torpedo containing 200 pounds of gun cotton.

"A ticklish position," you say?

The news story: it gives the air of being up-to-date

Not at all. The water-tight compartments of the "Florida" are controlled by Ajax Automatic Switches. When the torpedo hit us, the Ajax Automatic closed the bulkheads. I felt entirely safe and secure because I knew the Ajax would not fail.

The writer referred to a subject that had had wide publicity. He added a bit of personal experience, gave his readers some of the inside history of an important event.*

* This subject of the news story is treated more fully in a separate chapter. See Chapter XIV.

Comparing the reader with other people in similar circumstances

Again, the experiences of other people placed in circumstances similar to yours, are always interesting. Following are two examples:

You and Mason ought to compare notes.

For Mason has used the New York Herald, the Kansas City Star, The Cincinnati Enquirer, and a hundred or more other newspapers, weeklies, and magazines for years, and it would be a big thing for you if you could get together with him and go over his results.

Similarly:

Would you like to know what R. H. Aishton, vice-president and general manager of the Chicago and Northwestern Railroad; ex-Governor Chas. S. Deneen; Dr. John Dill Robertson; Jos. E. Otis, vice-president of the Central Trust Co.; Edgar A. Bancroft, general counsel for the International Harvester Co.; and a number of other prominent Chicago men are doing to keep themselves in fighting trim, both mentally and physically, every day?

Reaching the reader by touching on one of his vexing problems

Finally, there is no more effective appeal to interest than one that touches upon some special problem or difficulty that confronts the reader in his own business, or private life. This beginning gets the interest of the employing printer by summarizing many of his troubles:

If your press feeders always showed up on Monday morning; if they were never late, never got tired, never became careless, never grumbled about working overtime—you would increase the output of your plant, have less trouble, make more money. That is why you will be interested in the Speedwell Automatic feeding attachment.

This is the beginning of a letter sent out by a tailor:

This tailor used this idea effectively

With the incoming of the warm weather, you face the prospect of trying to keep cool for the next eighteen weeks. You already find that the suit you are wearing is much too heavy, and realize how much more comfortable you would feel in one of lighter weight.

This letter presents a problem which is in the prospect's mind, and thus wins his interest. Then the writer continues with a description of the cool summer fabrics which he has for sale.

The following letter was written by a manufacturer of washing machines:

Dear Madam:

Why do you continue the old-fashioned, back-breaking method of washing clothes, when the HORTON ELECTRIC will save all that hard work and bother?

The HORTON is not expensive—you can better afford it than sacrifice your health and strength over the washtub. Or if you have a wash-woman, the HORTON will save two-thirds of her time, which she can give to your other work,—etc.

A problem of the housewife is solved here

Here the writer gets attention by suggesting a solution for the most vexing problem of the housewife—the Monday washing.

There are, of course, any number of other ways to create real interest—the kind of interest that will carry the reader through your descriptive paragraphs and lead him to the favorable consideration of your proposition (page 75). Appeals to the pocket, to business or personal needs, to any one of the thousand matters that engage the interest of the normal man—all these are available. The field from which you may select is as broad as human nature itself, and as varied.

Be sure that the appeal is to the reader's interest —not yours

But whatever method you choose, be sure that your appeal is to the reader's interest. The common error is to ramble along on a subject which is of interest to yourself, not to your prospective customer.

Don't begin your letter by talking about yourself, your company, your business, your growth, your newly invested capital. The reader has not the faintest interest in you or your business, until he can see some connection between it and his own welfare. By itself it makes no play whatever to his attention: it must first be coupled up with his problems and needs.

Talk about his needs and problems

Begin by talking about him, his company, his business, his needs, his ambition. Touch upon some vital need in his business—some tangle that is worrying him —some cherished ambition that haunts him—and you will have his interest.*

We have now examined various specific means for arousing the interest of the reader. Sometimes, however, interest is secured without the use of such devices. This is especially true of letters written to progressive busi-

* For further discussion of the "You Element" in its relation to the whole letter, see Chapter XVI.

Letters which need no special device for arousing interest

ness men on matters concerning the conduct of their business. Such men are ready and eager to take advantage of every improvement; they watch closely every new development in their field. In writing to an alert manufacturer, for example, about a new machine, a new attachment for use on his product, or even a staple material, immediate interest can be gained by bringing to his notice at once your leading point of superiority and explaining it tersely and attractively.

If you are writing to an electric light man on the subject of a new incandescent lamp for use on his lines, get right down to cases:

A trade letter to a man in the trade

Dear Sir:

An efficiency of one watt per candle is guaranteed for the Hilight Lamps, which efficiency is maintained through a guaranteed life of 1,000 hours.

The attached report of tests by the Electrical Testing Laboratories will give you exact, detailed and unprejudiced information on this new unit,—etc.

Conclusion

In letters of this sort the reader's interest is secured by strong explanation or description without the aid of special devices. Whether or not this method shall be used in any given letter will depend upon the nature of the proposition and the class of readers. But however interest is aroused, it must be there, in order that the reader may be induced to continue into the descriptive paragraphs.

CHAPTER VIII

EXPLANATION—DESCRIBING THE PRODUCT

YOU have attracted attention; you have won interest; now to explain your proposition or describe your article. "This," says the amateur writer of letters, "is easy. All one has to do is to tell about the goods."

Description is a difficult art

This sounds easy, does it not? One has but to produce a word-picture of a definite object or explain tersely a service which he offers. Yet there is no ability more rare than that of translating a concrete article into words so that the reader can see that article vividly.

Before you can make the reader see the article, you must see it yourself. Learn all that there is to know about it. Study it, analyze it, look at it from every angle. Study its construction until you understand every part. See how it works, just what it will do. But you have not yet exhausted your sources of information. Go further back and learn about the raw material: what it is, and how it is obtained. Then trace this material through the factory—go in person if possible—and watch the process of making the article, see the interesting steps in its manufacture. All this will give you vivid detail which will make your description life-like and real. Of course you will not actually use in your description all the details thus gathered, but every one of them

First, study your article or proposition thoroughly

helps to give you a complete picture of the article. Without such a thorough knowledge, effective description is impossible. You cannot make your reader see the article vividly, if you yourself see it vaguely.

Select your details carefully

You are now ready to begin your description. First, you must decide on what points to select from among the many that you have learned. The amount of detail that you need will depend upon the extent of the knowledge which you may presume your reader to have of the article.

If you are selling something with which the reader may be expected to be fairly familiar, you will naturally slight the commonly known details and concentrate on points of superiority, or on essentials. (In letters written to dealers about articles closely connected with their line of business, little detail is used. It is in such letters that description is found in its simplest form. Indeed, if the article is a staple, no actual description is usually needed; a special low price or some other special advantage in buying is the only point that is emphasized.) If you are selling a fountain pen, you will not need to describe the general construction or explain the principle of operation. You will perhaps tell incidentally about the good material used in it, its good writing qualities, etc.—the features that it has in common with other good pens—but you will emphasize the distinctive points of superiority. One firm builds its description about a bent feedstock which insures against leaking. Another dwells particularly upon an improved self-filling device.

For articles of common use, concentrate on points of superiority

Also, in the following letter, notice how the manufacturer of a widely advertised breakfast food emphasizes one essential point—the quality of the bran—in selling orders by mail to retail grocers:

This letter emphasizes one feature

Morning Feast is made of a special soft white wheat, rolled by a process similar to that which is used in making Morning Oats. The flavor is delicious. Most bran is hard and gritty. The bran on this wheat is tender. People want bran, but they want it to taste good. Analysis of Morning Feast shows 25% bran and

3.9% fibre, yet the bran is hardly apparent unless pointed out. So-called "health biscuits" show one-third less bran efficiency.

More detail is needed for less familiar articles

On the other hand, if you are introducing a new article, or are writing to people who you think know little about the goods you are selling, you must use more detail—you must describe the construction more fully and show with greater minuteness how the article works. For example:

This electric sweeper has a number of new and novel features. It has a positive-driven, self-acting brush which is actuated by the movement of the machine over the carpet, and which not only thoroughly cleans carpets, rugs, and hardwood floors but also picks up ravelings, bits of cotton, lint, and threads. The brush adjusts itself automatically to the nap of the carpet.

This machine has an adjustable arrangement to lift and lower the front 12-inch nozzle.

It has a high grade electric motor set in a horizontal position, and therefore requires less friction, and consumes considerably less current than the ordinary electric sweepers.

It has a very large air capacity and an exceptionally powerful suction.

All metal parts, except the motor, are built of aluminum, to make the sweeper as light as possible.

The tools and connections are at the front of the machine where they are readily accessible and easily handled.

It has all the advantageous features of other electric sweepers of this type, and a number of additional improvements which put it in a class by itself.

The amount of detail in this letter is justified by the fact that it was written, not to dealers, but to prospective users who were, presumably, not very familiar with electric sweepers.

Choose your details from the reader's viewpoint

In choosing the essential points for your description you should look at the proposition from the user's standpoint and present it in its final relation to that user. A clever haberdasher never shows a scarf in the box. He takes it out and with a deft twist forms a four-in-hand over his finger, and the customer not only sees the scarf—its color, weave, and the play of light over the silken surface—but sees it in its relation to himself, as it will look when worn. This should also be the idea of the sales-letter writer as well as the salesman—to show the goods in their relation to the customer.

Two examples of taking the reader's point of view

A salt manufacturer carries out this idea:

> You know how ordinary table salt refuses to sift in damp weather, and when dry, cakes in the saltcellars like adamant. Our salt is always dry and flaky, and it flows freely on the dampest day. It does not corrode the metal top of a saltcellar as other salt often does in a moist atmosphere.

And a maker of underwear also strikes home:

> Crown underwear lets your body breathe. A continuous current of fresh air passes through the holes in the fabric, cooling, cleaning, and stimulating the pores of the skin.

Such description wins interest and even arouses desire because the reader feels its relation to himself.

Choose details that will interest your particular class of readers

Moreover, the points to be emphasized should be chosen with reference to the class of readers to whom you are writing. In the case of articles of such general use as the two represented above, the interests of all readers will be practically identical. For many articles, however, the points of interest will vary according to the needs of different classes of users.

Some examples

For instance, a gasoline engine has certain features that appeal to the farmer, others that make it suitable for the man who wants to use it in an automobile. In writing to the first class you will dwell especially on such points as its adaptability to pumping water and grinding feed; in a letter to the other you will emphasize its compactness, lightness, and the speed which it will develop. Again, suppose you are selling motor boats. For the father of several small children who wants a boat for family use at his summer house, safety is the important consideration. For the young man with racing proclivities, speed is the prime requisite. The writer of successful sales descriptions will keep these differences in mind, and adapt his descriptions to the particular class of readers to whom he is writing.

Make the description specific. Vague generalities like "the best on earth," "above competition," and "secret process of manufacture" carry no conviction. Avoid extravagances, vain claims, and superlatives. It

may be true that your product is the "best on earth," but it will take a good presentation of that fact or a specific explanation of at least one point of superiority to make a stranger believe it. See the difference between these two descriptions:

Make the description specific: generalities mean nothing

This tobacco is absolutely without question the finest smoking tobacco on the market today. This statement will be substantiated by tens of thousands of smokers.

Compare with:

A general description made specific

To appreciate the difference between Royal Mixture and the "others," just put a little of it on a sheet of white paper by the side of a pinch from a package of any other smoking tobacco manufactured. You won't need a microscope to see the difference in quality. Smoke a pipeful, and you will quickly notice how different in mellowness, richness and natural flavor Royal Mixture is from the store-bought kind. . . .

Royal Mixture is all pure tobacco, and the cleanest, best-cured and finest leaf that the famous Piedmont section of North Carolina can produce.

The following is another example of weak description. It is not, however, so hopelessly general as the first one cited above, for it has some specific detail:

Buy our hams once, and you will buy them always. All our meat is from young hogs, and is not tough, but is high grade. Nothing but corn-fed stock is used. We guarantee the quality. We use good sugar in curing our hams, the best quality of saltpeter, and some salt. The result is a natural flavor that can't be beat. We challenge competition.

But compare it with the same description rewritten with a wealth of concrete details:

Another example

This trade-mark certifies that the hog came from good stock—that it was corn-fed in order that it might be firm and sweet—that it was a barrow hog, so that the meat would be full-flavored and juicy—that it was a young hog, making the ham thin-skinned and tender—that it was well-conditioned and fat, insuring the lean of the ham to be tasty and nutritious. The mark certifies that the ham was cured in a liquor nearly good enough to drink, made of granulated sugar, pure saltpeter, and only a very little salt; this brings out all the fine, rich, natural flavor of the carefully selected meat, and preserves it without salty pickling.

Clothe your description in attractive and original phraseology. Avoid worn-out, colorless expressions; seek for those that are new and striking. For example, two writers, in letters selling acetylene gas plants, wish to

Use attractive and original phraseology

explain that the gas is harmless. One makes the obvious and commonplace statement: "Acetylene gas is harmless, and may be breathed without injury." The other is more original; he writes:

> Your home paper will print your obituary in the next issue—if you ever "blow out the gas" when you visit your cousin in the city. But when your city cousin comes to your country home, he can blow out your acetylene gas light, and it won't hurt him a bit to breathe it all night.

Which statement drives home the point? Which is more likely to make you buy?

A new way to express an old idea

Again take so simple a tool as a tap. All one can say about it, apparently, is that it is well made of the best steel, and carefully tempered. Everybody who ever wrote a letter on these tools said the same thing in the same words, until a New England manufacturer tried his hand. In describing the goods he said:

> You could forge a first class razor from one of our taps, and the razor would cut smooth and clean for the same reason that the tap does—'twould have the right stuff in it.

He does not say that his tap is made from razor steel (that would be commonplace), but that you could make a razor from one of his taps (this is distinctive). And then instead of a lot of hackneyed phrases designed to convince the reader that this steel is the best on earth, he states succinctly that his tap has "the right stuff in it." He simply takes a fresh viewpoint—has the courage to use unexpected words.

A "refreshing" description

Likewise, a real estate promoter might have said: "This suburb is supplied with pure, cold water from a spring." Instead, this promoter wrote:

> Fresh Spring Water, so pure and delicious that it is bottled and sold, is piped through all the streets. Just think of that, as compared with having to buy your table water, or to drink Croton water unsatisfactorily filtered!

Sometimes whole paragraphs of description may be crystallized into a single suggestion of comparison; thus:

> The Bell refrigerator is as finely finished as the most expensive piano.

Effective description by means of suggestion

A furniture maker gives me a distinct impression of the quality of his goods when he says:

> There is as much difference between the oak used in ordinary furniture and the selected quarter-sawed white oak we use in ours, as there is between laundry soap and a cake of scented Pears.

And still another puts a wealth of suggestion into his letter by saying:

> Nothing will effectually take the place of the good old cedar chest, with its clean, sweet, pungent aroma so dear to the heart of the old-fashioned housewife.

Value of descriptive enclosures

Sometimes descriptive enclosures, such as circulars, leaflets, sheets of specifications, and samples, are used to help in describing the article. Samples are always a valuable aid to description: they enable the reader actually to see and handle parts of the article. Wherever possible, all these enclosures should be small enough to enclose in the same envelope with the letter, for then the reader can refer to them while the interest aroused by the letter is at its height.

Frequently, most of the description is given in a circular or leaflet. Indeed, when the description is complicated and requires many details, it should always be placed there, and not in the letter itself. Then an illustration or diagram may be used to give a more definite picture. But even when this is done, the letter should describe briefly one or two of the more important features of the article, and should definitely call the attention of the reader to the circular. In your letter concentrate on getting the reader interested in these essential points. Do that, and you may depend upon his going to the circular for details.

Conclusion

Finally, it must be remembered that the object of every sales-letter description is to make the reader both understand and desire the goods. It is not enough merely to tell about what you have for sale. You must tell it in a sales-making manner. Make the reader see the article clearly, and make him see it in relation to his needs.

CHAPTER IX

PROVING YOUR CLAIMS

Every sales claim in a letter must be proved

IT IS a principle in law that a man is innocent until proved guilty. It is a principle in business that a sales claim is false or exaggerated until it is proved conservative and true. In either event, the work of proving a case is a hard one, and calls for keen thought and a wide knowledge of human nature.

Cold, hard logic, and cold, hard facts—these alone will win. "Brag" and rash claims will spell failure.

When you have explained your proposition in a sales letter, you must prove your words. It is not enough to express your own personal convictions; it is not enough to give hearsay evidence or second-hand testimonials. You must prove your claims, and quickly.

A free trial is convincing proof

Of course, many times the only way to prove that an article is all that you say it is, is for me to get it and try it. Suppose I am thinking of buying a mattress and the dealer writes to me:

> This mattress will never mat, pack, get hard or lumpy, and furthermore, it is absolutely non-absorbent, dust-proof, vermin-proof, and practically un-wear-out-able.

Now if all this is true, that is the kind of mattress I want; and to prove to me that these claims are true, the writer goes on to say:

Money back if trial is unsatisfactory

Remember, we sell on the complete understanding that if the mattress is not perfectly satisfactory, it can be returned at our expense, and your money will be promptly refunded.

I reason instantly that if the writer of that letter wasn't able to prove his arguments by delivering the goods as exploited, he would never dare to make an offer like this. I know from experience that a plain, hard-hitting talk like this means truth.

Similar proof is offered in the following:

Do not think that because the price is small, my cigars are made carelessly or of cheap tobacco. Order a sample 100, cut open any five of them from end to end, and if the leaves are not all good long filler, I will refund your money.

An indirect proof

A maker of refrigerators proves that his goods are quality stock, too, when he says:

If I could only take you through our factory so you could see what goes into the "Morton" and how it is put in—the care and pains we take to make a refrigerator that will last a lifetime, you would not hesitate to make the investment.

This is not absolute proof, but it is convincing, for it makes the reader feel that the manufacturer is willing to have him come to the factory, and he is therefore ready to believe that if he did go, he would find the conditions just as described.

Proof furnished by samples enclosed

A varnish manufacturer sends along a sample panel finished with his varnish, and writes:

Give this panel the most thorough test possible—stamp on it with your heel or hit it with a hammer. Then hold it to the light. You will find that although you have dented the wood, the varnish has not been cracked.

A paper manufacturer is even more successful when he says:

You can prove the excellence of our word in a second: just tear a corner off this sheet; then tear a corner off one of your present letterheads; now get a magnifying glass and examine both torn edges. You find long fibres—linen threads—on ours, while on yours the fibres are short, woody.

The man who reads this learns something new about paper. He learns how to judge it intelligently—and in doing this, he learns what the writer wished him to know about his bond.

Simple tests suggested as proof

Similarly, a paint manufacturer encloses with his sales letter a small folder showing how to test the purity of paint; a clothing manufacturer explains how to distinguish all-wool goods from the half-cotton product offered in substitution; a maker of acetylene gas lighting outfits proves the simplicity and safety of this gas—which is popularly supposed to be dangerous in the extreme—by describing how anyone may make acetylene gas with an ordinary tumbler and common clay pipe. Such proof, sometimes applied in a most indirect manner, is wholly convincing. Not the least part of its value lies in the fact that it is instructive. The reader feels that he is learning a trick of the other man's trade.

Proof by reference to authorities

Another simple expedient is referring for corroboration to standard works of reference, to friends of the reader, or to specialists in any line. "As any chemist will tell you," is effective. Or we may say: "Consult your banker as to the solid value of these bonds: he may have others he would prefer to sell you, but he will not fail to endorse these." Nine times in ten the reader will never carry the matter further; he accepts your statement merely because you are willing he should take disinterested advice.

Scientific proof

A well-known glass company which manufactures scientific reflectors for all classes of interior lighting uses photometric curves, prepared by the most eminent independent authority, to establish its claims. Perhaps not half of those who receive this evidence are able to read or understand a photometric curve, but the very fact that impartial evidence is offered as proof is enough to win the prospective customer's confidence.

Direct and complete testimonials are also strong proof, but the use of these by patent medicine advertisers, and the numerous stories current as to the trickery and unfair means used to secure them, make the testimonial a two-edged weapon which must be handled skillfully to be effective.

Testimonials: their use and misuse

A testimonial in which names and addresses are omitted is prima facie evidence of insincerity—or worse. For instance, the writer who refers to "A well-known lawyer in this city, whose name we are not permitted to use," invites suspicion. On the other hand,

"John Hays Smith, publisher of the Age, 138 West 42nd St., New York, says:" is sincere.

"We are permitted to quote the following from a letter by Mrs. Albert Ross, president of the Woman's League, 462 Woodward Ave., Detroit," rings true.

The name should be well known; the title, if any, expressed at length; the addresses given in full.

Also the testimonial that carries conviction must be specific in its statements. One that merely says, "I am very much pleased with your machine," has little weight; but one that testifies, "By installing your system of lighting, we saved a thousand dollars in one year," gives convincing evidence of value.

Modified forms of testimonials

Similar to the testimonial is the reference to an order from a prominent firm. The announcement that "Marshall Field & Company have just purchased twenty-five more of our adding machines," backs up the quality of the goods with all of that firm's reputation for using efficient equipment.

Another variation of the direct testimonial is the list of satisfied users. Such a list, especially if it is made up of names of well-known people, is valuable proof.

Proof presented in enclosures

Obviously, some kinds of proof cannot be made a part of the letter itself. Long testimonials, or a number of them, extensive citations of expert opinion, or any device that requires much space should be given in an enclosed circular or leaflet. When this is done, however, the letter itself should be connected up with the enclosure by definite reference to the most important points.

Finally, one of the best proofs of the truth of a letter is the tone of sincerity which pervades it. A letter will

A tone of sincerity is a valuable aid to proof

get returns if it is sincere, and these returns will be permanent. But a letter of half-truths, a letter which betrays your unbelief or evidences your effort to befog or mislead your reader, will produce nothing but trouble. It may bring results, but not the kind of results that any reputable firm wants. The letter displayed on pages 90 and 91 is the kind that brings the results a firm *does* want.

Cause of insincerity in tone

Lack of sincerity in a letter does not necessarily argue dishonesty in the writer. Rather, it indicates a wrong point of view toward the trade. We form the habit of viewing our customers in the mass instead of as individuals. In the petty annoyances of daily detail, we grow impatient of their seeming stupidity, their meanness, their constant complaints, their attempts to take small advantages. And then, when we sit down to write a letter, we address a composite being having these unwelcome characteristics.

For myself, the only sure guide for writing a sincere and effective letter is to picture it as going to some shrewd, kindly, wise, David Harum sort of individual whose keen insight tests every word and statement by the light of long experience. I know that evasions and twisted half-truths will not escape the eye of that man.

The remedy: how to make your letter sincere

Try this plan for yourself. Think of this man as you write. Try to convince him. And as you hope to do that, make your letter sincere. Be honest. Be frank. Be straightforward—above-board—guileless. From the date-line at the top of your letter to the stenographer's hieroglyphics at the bottom, let every word, phrase, sentence, and paragraph impress your reader as being wholly and unreservedly "on the level."

CHAPTER X

PERSUADING THE PROSPECT TO BUY

YOU have now given proof of the quality of your article and of the benefit which other men have derived from owning it and using it. This, however, is not enough to make the reader feel that he ought to own it. Suppose, for example, that you are trying to sell him an automatic revolver. He may agree that it is an excellent weapon, and he may trust the statements of a dozen men that they would not be without it. If, however, he has never been in a position where he needed a revolver and does not anticipate being in such a position, he has no desire to own one. You must make him see that he does need this weapon, that it is carelessness or folly not to have it. When you thus bring it into relation to his own needs, he is ready to buy. To make the reader see his need of the article you are offering—to make him want to own it—is the purpose of persuasion in the sales letter.

Persuasion shows the reader his need for your article

Persuasion is of two types: first, exhortation; and second, a convincing presentation of the benefits to be derived from the possession of the article. The first type should be used sparingly, and in some lines of business is almost never employed. The second type is a prominent element in every successful sales letter. It per-

Two types of persuasion

vades the whole letter: it is the keynote of the interest-arousing device; it directs the choice of points in the description; and it is behind the special inducement. In addition, a separate paragraph of direct persuasion is sometimes added; but this is not always necessary.

First type: exhortation —too intimate for general use

The use of persuasion by exhortation involves a certain intimacy at which it is difficult to arrive in business. Before we dare employ it, we must know that our standing with our prospective customer is such that he will not resent our placing a paternal hand on his knee and talking to him "for his own good." Unless we have attained this degree of intimacy, exhortation is likely to prove a dangerous weapon.

Nothing is better calculated to stir the ire and call forth the contempt of a big, busy, self-sufficient business man than to be asked, "Can you afford to be without this great boon another day?" "Will you let your prejudice stand between you and future wealth?"—and similar exhortation. Nothing will so quickly freeze your prospective client into glacial indifference as, "Will your stockholders approve of your rejecting this dividend-producing offer?" Yet these phrases and dozens of the same sort have been used, and used by men whose familiarity with their own work has allowed them to become familiar with their customers.

The effect of the wrong use of exhortation

When tactfully worded, and employed in the right place, exhortation has its legitimate use. "Can you afford to permit a competitor to gain control of this profitable line?" is persuasion to a merchant. "Certainly your boy should have the best!" is a strong appeal to a mother. On the other hand, to tell a man that he is damaging his business by ignoring your offer, or to tell a woman that she is not treating her offspring right by refusing to equip them at Jones' Emporium, may be untrue, and certainly is lacking in tact.

Exhortation must be tactfully worded and sparingly used

But use it sparingly always—and remember that in some lines of business it has no place at all. Insurance,

business instruction, banking by mail, building and loan propositions, and other lines where the prosperity and comfort of clients are at issue, lend themselves to sale by exhortation. Commodities of daily business are best presented without it.

Second type: showing the prospect how he will be benefited

The second type of persuasion is more effective. It endeavors to present the proposition to the customer in such an alluring way that he wants to take advantage of your offer. It tactfully points out the benefits which he will derive from it, the gain that will be his; and shows just how the proposition is adapted to his particular needs. A good example is shown on page 98. Notice the contrast with the letter on page 99. Such persuasion appears in some form in every sales letter.

Two examples from letters of business schools

Here is the way a business school uses this type:

> Think of those times when you have yearned for a future—when you have grown impatient with the barriers that seem to hold you down to such a narrow sphere of life—when you hear of the career of some acquaintance whom you know to be no more capable than you. It is a matter of developed opportunity.
>
> Our instruction perfects you in a profession that is golden with opportunity. It fits you for success anywhere. Would you like to make your residence in busy, cosmopolitan New York? Would you like to live in some quaint old southern town like New Orleans? Would you like some bustling western city like Kansas City or San Francisco? Would you like to live in a quiet old national capital—Washington?
>
> The profession we will train you for, will enable you to choose your own location—there is unlimited demand for it everywhere. Will you not let me show you how you may reach out and grasp this opportunity?

Another business school also got this idea when it wrote:

These show definitely how the reader will gain

> Nearly every man can look back—and not so far back either for most of us—and say, "If I had taken that chance, I would be much better off now." That is what you will say some day not far off, if you fail to consider seriously what we have offered you in our law courses, for our proposition means just what I have said—a bigger earning capacity, a better position and standing, and brighter prospects in life.

The preceding illustrations name definitely the benefits to be derived by the reader from the proposition offered in the letter. Sometimes only a suggestion of

Dear Sir:

Urges careful reading of catalogue

Put a Silver-side Canoe through any test that you wish, and it will live up to your expectations. Pick out any canoe you like from the enclosed catalogue and get your share of the canoeing fun. Don't miss a day. Silver-side Canoes are built for service and pleasure.

Interest

They take to the waters where they are used, just like a duck. Experienced fishermen, hunters, guides, and scouts require Silver-side Canoes for their excursions, because the selection of their equipment is never left to chance and they know that a Silver-side Canoe never balks.

Persuasion

With a canoe you can enjoy the waterways near your home, and get the boon of health and recreation which nature means that all of us shall have. Canoeing takes you out into the great open air and brings you back refreshed and eager to go again.

Inducement

Silver-side Canoes are low-priced, and they will last for years. Their first cost gives you an outfit ready for use and with no further expense. Remember, we pay the freight this side of Denver.

Clincher

Buy now and lose no time when the season opens. We ship the day the order reaches us, and the railroads can now deliver with unusual speed. We have had long experience in making and using canoes; so if you are undecided which style of canoe to choose, write to us on the enclosed blank for suggestions.

Yours truly,

PERSUASION THAT WINS PROMPT ACTION

Here is a good reply to an inquiry. It is calculated to win the inquirer's personal interest and prompt his immediate action, by an attractive presentation of the pleasures of canoeing, and the superior quality of the Silver-side canoe. This makes a strong persuasive appeal.

Dear Sir:

Agreeable to your recent request for a catalogue of our school and information regarding our business courses, we wish to state that under separate cover we are mailing you a copy of our latest catalogue, in which you will find complete description of what we have to offer. We hope that after reading this, you will decide to enroll with us.

Too formal

Lacks sales value

Holding ourselves at your disposal for any additional information you may require, and thanking you for the inquiry, we trust to have an acknowledgment from you on receipt of the catalogue in order to know that it reached you safely, and awaiting your further commands, we remain

Prompts no action

Very truly yours,

WHY A SALES LETTER OFTEN MISSES THE MARK

This is an actual letter of the type too often used in replying to an inquiry. Here the prospect is merely referred to the catalogue, and the letter serves only as a too formal acknowledgment, absolutely wanting in sales value. Commonplace phrases and words serve only to make the letter more objectionable.

A suggestion of benefits is often effective

these benefits furnishes sufficient persuasion. A prominent ladies' tailor used this idea effectively when he wrote:

> I am sure, madam, that if you could see yourself in one of these suits, you would acknowledge its perfect fit and exceptional finish.

Here is only a suggestion. The active persuasion is left to the imagination, which, picturing a desirable result, can be counted upon to overcome the objections of the reader.

A watch manufacturer makes good use of suggestion in this way:

> You probably do not buy a watch with the idea of selling it again; yet that is a pretty good test of value. If you want to know the standing of ————, try to buy one at second hand.

Examples of persuasion by suggestion

Another case is that of a piano agency which has done a large business in the East, chiefly through sales-letters written by the head of the firm. One argument presented was:

> Talk this proposition over with your husband. As a business man, he will be able to guide you in business matters. The choice of the instrument can be left to you safely.

For letters in some lines of business these separate paragraphs of persuasion, even of the suggestive form, are too familiar. In such cases the persuasive appeal must be kept in the background and brought in incidentally by combining it with the other elements of the letter. For example, the beginning of the letter which states the troubles of the employing printer (see p. 78) not only arouses his interest but also suggests his need of the remedy which the letter offers—that is, it contains the element of persuasion. So does the beginning given on p. 73: "You've got to have more money." We have also seen that we choose the points in our description from the standpoint of the reader's needs (see p. 83). That also is persuasion disguised as a part of description. Likewise, the special inducement which will be discussed in the next chapter, gathers up

Frequently, persuasion is combined with other elements

and reinforces all the persuasive appeals in the letter, and seeks to turn them into immediate action.

Summary of preceding points

Thus, persuasion is an essential element in every sales letter. Sometimes exhortation is effective, but it is too familiar and intimate in tone for frequent or universal use. Persuasion of the second type—that which makes the reader realize his need of the article—is always present. In some letters a separate paragraph is devoted to it, but this method also is often too familiar. In such a case the persuasion is combined with the other elements. No definite rule can be given to guide the writer in his choice of the method to use. He must decide according to the conditions involved in each individual case. But before using the more intimate forms, he should be sure that his relations with the reader warrant such familiarity. Persuasion should never be made intrusive; the reader should not be made to feel that the writer is trying to force him to act.

A warning against a common fault

This chapter may fittingly be concluded with a warning against a practice all too common among correspondents: don't try to persuade a man to answer your letter by assuming an attitude of injury. If a man writes to you for information about the article you have for sale, or requests the sample or booklet you offer to give away free, don't think you can make him send you money by causing him to feel that he is indebted to you for sending him what you agreed to, free of all charges. Don't dictate, or attempt to force him to do business with you. Any letter a man writes you because he thinks he has to, isn't worth the stamp that carries it. Here, for example, is the way one firm begins a letter which it expects to win customers:

An example of an "injured dignity" letter

Did you ever have the unpleasant experience of addressing a person upon a subject, without even being accorded the courtesy of a reply—or worse still, did you ever answer anyone's questions, to the best of your ability, without receiving a word in return for your time or trouble? If you have had either one or both of these experiences, you will understand how we feel because you haven't answered our letters.

How such a letter affects the reader

That is only the beginning of this wailing and gnashing-of-teeth letter. The first thing the young man who received this letter said was, "My, look at the raking over these fellows are giving me, simply because I accepted their invitation to investigate their article. I didn't find it what I wanted; so what was the use of writing?"

A better method

Antagonism is the first product of such a letter. Instead of going after a prospect as though he had committed a sin, it would have been a hundred per cent more profitable to have continued the follow-up with a letter showing the prospect in a new way that the article was what he needed and wanted.

Persuasion prepares the way for the inducement

Whether its immediate object is to get a reply to a letter or to make a sale, persuasion must not attempt to force a decision. It must not antagonize the reader. It must put him in the proper frame of mind to consider the proposition favorably. If it does that, and leads him to see the value of the proposition to himself, it has performed its work. Then a little additional inducement ought to lead the prospect over the line and into the ranks of the buyers.

CHAPTER XI

WHAT INDUCEMENTS TO OFFER

SKILFUL description, incontestable proof, and convincing persuasion will, in some cases, land the order, but frequently these need to be reinforced by some inducement that hastens the act of buying. The letter without an inducement may convince a man that the goods for sale are desirable and that they are suited to his personal needs, but it leaves a loophole for procrastination.

Inducement reinforces persuasion

Your own experience is proof of this. You have probably determined to buy mesh underwear, insured sox, a dozen magazines, a piano player, and an automobile—some time. You are convinced of their good points, you know that you want them, and you have the price. All that is necessary is the proper inducement—the galvanic spark which will quicken into life this latent desire. And so it is with your customers.

Inducement means showing gain

Gain is at the bottom of all inducements. Gain is the root of all business action. But gain is not always a matter of dollars and cents. Besides the gain in "Special price for a few days;" the gain in the "Special reduction, if you send your dealer's name," and the gain in the free sample, there is also the subtle suggestion of gain in "This may change the entire course of your

life;" in "Information that may save you hours of uncertainty;" and dozens of others that do not represent anything tangible, but mean gain, just the same.

Inducement is more dynamic than persuasion

Thus, the inducement has much in common with persuasion. Both are based on gain, on the good to be derived from the possession of the article. But the inducement is more dynamic: its purpose is to focus the attention of the reader on the necessity of making sure of the gain by immediate action—by accepting the offer now.

Various kinds of inducement:

Inducements are as various as sunsets. A familiar one is the warning that only a limited supply of the goods is available. A book publisher uses this effectively by giving exact figures on the number of copies of certain books that he is able to supply:

"Limited supply" warning

In six weeks more our contract with the author expires. Three times we have been forced to renew this contract; three times we have ceased all book advertising; and still the orders have continued to pile in so heavily that another arrangement with Mr. ———— was imperative.

Of the 30,000 sets we have printed altogether, there are now about 149 in the stockroom, and 1,000 more are going through the bindery. If you had seen the orders streaming in at a 200-a-day clip at the termination of other contracts, you would realize how quickly these 1,149 sets will melt away. While we still have books on hand, I want them to go to our own old customers. I cannot, of course, discriminate against outsiders; I must fill the orders as they come in. But I can urge you to speak for your set now.

This is perhaps rather long and detailed for general use. A similar inducement in briefer form follows:

An effective example

We have just 146 sets of these books to sell at $18.50. When the new edition is in, it will be impossible to get a set at less than $25. The old edition is just as good as the new, but we are entirely out of circular matter describing the green cloth binding, and as we don't want to print a new lot of circulars just to sell 146 sets, we make this unusual offer. Now is your chance.

Reduced price is another common inducement. In the preceding illustration this is combined with the "limited supply" warning. When a reduced price is offered, a good reason for it should be given, for otherwise the reader is likely to be suspicious of the quality of

Dear Mr. Wilson:

It is just a year since I sent you that memorable letter about the Crown Calculator. When that letter was written, I had an unknown, unheard-of appliance to tell you about. Today nearly 5,000 of these machines are in everyday use.

Natural expression

In great business offices all over the land, in stores, in factories, the Crown is saving time, money, and errors in clerical labor. It is no longer an experiment.

Proof

I don't know why you have been silent during these twelve months. But whatever has prevented you from trying this machine, I want to permit you to place this calculator in your office and try it.

Inducement and proof

So I am making you this offer — an offer so fair and broad that even if you had made it yourself you could not have made the conditions fairer. It is no longer a question of whether the machine is really practical. It is no longer a question of whether or not you can afford it — for under the new offer, YOU PAY FOR THE MACHINE AS IT PAYS FOR ITSELF.

Inducement mingled with persuasion and proof

Read the offer through. Only a quarter a day places the Crown in your office AT ONCE. The first payment of $5 enables you to put the machine into immediate money-saving, money-making use. And the balance you have nearly a whole year to pay.

Inducement

I have attached a convenient coupon to the circular enclosed. Simply sign this coupon -- enclose it in an envelope with a $5 bill, and mail it to me — AT MY RISK. Your name is enough security for me. The Crown will go forward, all transportation charges fully prepaid.

Clincher making ordering easy

Yours very truly,

STRONG INDUCEMENT NATURALLY EXPRESSED

Whether the inducement is large or small, it should be clearly understood. Therefore the inducement should be stated in the most natural way possible. Here the inducement wins the reader's entire confidence. The offer is stated so clearly that there is little chance for subsequent misunderstanding.

Dear Sir:

Eliminating objections

Why have you not sent us YOUR subscription to PROFITS?

It cannot be the price—$1—for you would gladly give many times that amount for the ideas that a single issue of PROFITS will bring.
It cannot be the want of time—for a mere stroke of the pen would place your name on PROFITS' mailing list.
It cannot be that you are not interested—for who ever heard of a business man who did not want his business, his efficiency, his income to grow?
It cannot be the lack of opportunity—for we have written you five letters, giving you five opportunities.

But we write once again. Will you give yourself a chance to learn what PROFITS is accomplishing for you even while you are keeping it from your desk?

Retains interest by leading directly to offer

Your choice of any ONE of the remarkable series of business books described in the enclosed folder! That's the offer.

Bear in mind: one book FREE with your renewal! And every idea in every volume is specific, practical, USABLE—written by experts. Here are correct, definite, detailed solutions for those business problems that so long have vexed you.

Ordering made easy

Run your finger down the nine titles. Pick out the book YOU need. Mark your choice and send with a $1 bill TODAY.

We will not only send you PROFITS for the next twelve months, but will also forward you, absolutely free, even transportation charges prepaid, the book that YOU choose. This is a fair offer.

Yours very truly,

AN INDUCEMENT THAT PULLED MANY ORDERS

This follow-up letter has been successful in pulling a large number of orders. Without the slightest suggestion of apology, it condenses the arguments that have gone before and then offers the prospect an attractive inducement as a climax not only of the letter, but of the entire series.

the article or of the genuineness of the reduction. The publisher with the 146 sets found a good reason in the necessity of printing new circulars.

Inducement of reduced price for introduction

One reduced price inducement, with an adequate reason, is the offer of lower price for introduction:

The Wright Copy Holder sells the world over for $3.00. We are certain, however, that once you see the holder actually increasing the output of your own typist you will want to equip your entire office with them. So, for a limited time only, we are going to make you an introductory price of $2.25. Send today for one of these holders,—etc.

Low prices during dull seasons

Similarly, low prices are offered during dull seasons:

We are going to remodel our store during our dull season—put in a brand new front and sales room, install new cutting rooms, new fitting rooms, new sewing rooms, and make ours the finest tailoring establishment in the Southwest. We have to do this to take care of our rapidly increasing business.

So—to reduce our stock before we begin to tear things up, we will make for you any $50 suit for $35; any $45 suit for $30; and any $40 or $35 suit for $25.

Advance in price

Notice of advance in price also encourages prompt action. A business school writes:

On November 1 the cost of taking the efficiency course will advance 25%. After that date, no one can on any account get the old tuition rates.

Sign the enclosed enrollment blank at once—and save the 25% advance.

Free trial

Another inducement is the offer of a free trial or free examination:

We do not want you to buy in the dark. We want you to be certain that the Author's National edition of Mark Twain's Works will be a valuable addition to your library. That is why we will send you the twenty-five volumes at our expense. That is why you may examine them thoroughly—not for a few minutes—but for ten days. That is why you may send the books back "collect" if unsatisfactory. The subscription to the magazine will be cancelled, and you will owe us nothing if you do not keep the books.

A wide range of inducements

This is only a suggestive list of inducements. There are many others. You may play up the seasonableness of the article, you may offer some special service, such as advertising in the local paper (when selling to retail dealers), or you may give a special prize. Any offer

that impels the reader to act promptly on your proposition is good inducement. Study the inducements in the letters on pages 105 and 106.

A common error in handling the inducement is that of attaching false or fictitious value to what is offered. One brilliant sales manager whose firm dealt in mine machinery and supplies won many customers by constant reference to a loose-leaf catalogue for which he issued new sheets and revised prices each week. The system was so thorough and the new sheets were so valuable that many customers used it simply because it was easy to handle.

Warning against false inducements

Another sales manager tried the same inducement, using a bound catalogue of huge dimensions. He failed. In both instances the catalogues were remarkable, but one was serviceable and the other clumsy—one constituted a real inducement and the other was a deterrent.

The inducement feature of the sales letter must always stand before the most searching inquiry. To fool a customer into responding to your letter may mark you as exceptionally clever, but that customer will neither forgive nor forget if he finds it out.

A real inducement forces a decision

The inducement, then, must make a real offer. If it does that, it hastens the decision of the prospect, and leads him to the point where he is ready to buy. The work of the writer of the sales letter is now almost finished; but one task remains—only one, but very important. He must provide a means for making ordering easy. This will be discussed in the next chapter.

CHAPER XII

SUMMARY AND CLIMAX—CLINCHING THE SALE

A parable of a foolish salesman

SUPPOSE a salesman came into your office with an article, demonstrated its qualities, proved your need of it and its value to you, made you want it so badly that you were just reaching into your pocket to pay for it—and then, when he could have your money for the asking, suppose he suddenly strapped up his sample case, said: "I will be glad to talk to you more about this some other time," and walked out of the door.

What kind of salesman would you call him?

A shoe manufacturer tried to sell me a pair of shoes by mail. He wrote a letter that had me interested, convinced, almost ready to buy. Then instead of a clincher that decided me, I struck this last paragraph: "We solicit further correspondence with you concerning our proposition." What did I do? I shot that letter into the waste-basket, and bought a pair of shoes on my way home.

Analogy in a sales letter

Any difference between the absurdly imaginary salesman in the first paragraph and the very actual letter writer in the second? Not a bit.

But suppose the shoe manufacturer had closed by saying: "Simply check the size and style you want on the enclosed blank; sign and mail it today with $3.00 in

any convenient form, and the shoes will come to you at once, all charges paid." Suppose he had said that! The chances are a hundred to one he would have my money now and I would be wearing his shoes.

And there you have in a nutshell the vital essential that makes or kills a sales letter.

The climax turns desire into action

You are wasting time and energy when you concentrate your strength in your argument and then fail to turn desire into action. What is the use of making the prospect want your goods if you wind up your letter with a close that lets him feel he might as well wait a day or two? Let him wait, and the chances are that next day your competitor comes along with a letter that strikes home. Then he gets the business, and your letter slides from the hold-over file into the waste-basket.

Make your prospect want to order, of course, but don't stop there. Make it easy for him to order and make him do it now. That is what is meant by real climax: it tells the prospect what to do and when to do it—it crystallizes all that goes before into the act itself.

Two parts of the climax:

The successful climax usually has two parts. The first consists of what we have termed persuasion and inducement—it summarizes all the preceding strong points of the letter, it shows the gain that is mine in ordering, the loss that is mine by delay. It emphasizes return and minimizes cost. It is the paragraph that says: "Just think what you are getting—this and this and this, all for the small sum of ——. Think what it means to you, to your future. And remember, you do not risk one penny. Every cent of your money will be returned to you if you are not satisfied. Why delay a single moment?"

1. A strong summing up of persuasion and inducement

2. The clincher

When he reads that, your man is almost ready to act —but not quite, for your climax lacks the clincher. What is he to do to get all the things you offer? Tell him. Make it so plain and so easy that he will have not a reason in the world for not ordering. If you don't,

you haven't finished your letter; and lacking the effect of that clincher, your prospect is going to lapse from his "almost ready" attitude back into indifference.

How the salesman uses his order blank

Now how can you get him to act? Go back to the star salesman. How does he do it? He gives you something to sign. He lays before you an order blank complete save only for your signature. Note how easy he has made it for you to order; he does not ask that you hunt up a letterhead and draw up an order of your own. He has the order all printed and within easy reach.

The clincher in the letter does the same

Just apply his idea to your letter. Give the man something to sign: a post card filled out, addressed and ready to mail, a coupon that simply awaits his name—or some little easy-as-lifting-your-finger act to do that makes answering almost automatic. Notice how the letter on page 113 comes up to a strong close, in contrast with the weak letter on page 112.

When it is rightly employed there is something marvellous about the tempting power of the little blank that awaits your name. It must, however, be used tactfully. No man likes to be bull-dozed by another into signing anything. He balks when the tactless salesman literally shoves the order before him and attempts to force his signature. Force instantly arouses his antagonism.

But watch the clever salesman who has learned the subtle influence of the waiting blank itself. He places the order before you, but he lets it do its own tempting. He talks not the order but the goods; not your name, but your needs. And when you pick up your pen and sign your name, you do so on your own initiative because you want the goods he sells.

It makes ordering easy

Now the beauty of all this is that the clever salesman's methods fit perfectly into the scheme of paper salesmanship. You have built up your interest, proof, persuasion, and inducement, and now, when you have your prospect convinced, almost ready to say "I will buy," you do as the salesman does: make it easy for him

Dear Sir:

Weak and too formal

We have not had the pleasure of having received a reply to the letter we addressed to you about two weeks ago, and we pause to ask if you received that letter, as well as the catalog which we mailed you at the same time. If so, we trust that our prices and superior quality of Princeton Piano Player have so interested you as to insure your order when you are ready to purchase. If, however, the catalog and letter did not reach you, kindly advise us, and we will mail duplicates.

Lacks interest

Apology weakens appeal

We are real anxious to secure your order, yet do not want to annoy you continually with a lot of stereotyped letters such as are generally sent out by factories selling their products by mail — in other words we do not abruptly conclude that simply because you were kind enough to write us relative to our goods that you are under obligations to buy of us. We trust, however, that after you have gone over the matter very carefully you will decide that our Princeton Player is the best for the money, and that when you are ready to purchase, you will favor us with your order, as we know you will never have any cause to regret it.

Why should I?

More weakening apology

In the meantime, if you have no objections, we will mail you now and then illustrations and descriptions of each of our new styles as we place them on the market, feeling that you will be interested in the latest up-to-date styles, even though you may not be in an immediate need of them yourself.

Again thanking you for the inquiry,

Very truly yours,

A SALES LETTER THAT FAILED

Here is an actual letter used as the fourth and the last in a follow-up series. It is poor because it not only is lacking wholly in explanation and proof as to quality or price, but throughout it takes entirely the wrong attitude—that of a continual apology for taking the prospect's time, for following him up at all.

Dear Mr. Carter:

The only thing that has kept you from ordering a Princeton Piano Player long before this is that

— you are still a little in doubt as to its value

— you still hesitate to believe that it offers positively the biggest value that your money can purchase.

Direct

There are a number of ways in which we might once and for all time remove your prejudice, your doubts, your misgivings:

— We might point to the 8,143 satisfied purchasers

— We might show you the stream of more than half a thousand orders each month

— We might pull open drawer after drawer filled to bursting with unsolicited testimonials.

Three condensed proofs convincingly stated

But we have a plan better by far.

You are to try the Princeton Player in your own home for thirty days — one full month — AT OUR RISK.

Inducement

Simply deposit the first small payment. The player will be delivered to your home, ready for your use. Then put it to a test as thorough — as severe — as you wish. If the player does not more than please and satisfy you in every particular, simply say so and we will remove it at our expense and refund every penny of your deposit.

Proof

Could we possibly make a fairer, more liberal offer?

Persuasion

Accept this offer today. Simply sign the enclosed deposit blank, enclose $10 and mail now, and the player will come at once.

Strong close

Very truly yours,

THE SAME OFFER IN WINNING FORM

This rewritten letter, covering the proposition on the opposite page, without a suggestion of apology, goes straight to the point with ample proof and offers a still stronger inducement. While this letter is longer than the other, it is easier to read because it is broken into short paragraphs.

to decide, literally lay a waiting order blank before him.

Using the return card or coupon

Refer him to your little business-getting supplement —the blank or card or coupon. Simply tell him what to do and what the result will be; say, "You do this and we will do that." And with the perfect assurance that whatever move he makes will be of his own choice, your man will find ordering so easy that he can't resist; he will "sign and mail today."

The card or coupon must be simple and easily filled in

That is the purpose of the clincher: to make ordering easy. If an order blank or return post card is used, it should be completely filled in so that the reader has only to sign his name. If money is to be sent, an easy means of doing that must be provided.

Note, for example, how simple an act one house makes ordering:

> Merely sign the last page of the booklet enclosed—pin a two-dollar bill to it—and mail us today.

Elementary, isn't it? No writing a letter, no buying a draft. The homesteader on a stage route with the stub of a pencil and a two dollar note could answer that letter as well as an executive surrounded by a bevy of stenographers.

These people exemplify the idea perfectly when they say:

> Simply pin a $2.00 bill to this letter as a deposit, and we will send the book by the first mail. Look the book over carefully. If you don't see a dollar's worth in almost every page, write a mere postal and we will return your $2.00.
>
> There are no restrictions, no conditions, no strings on this offer. It is open to every well rated business man who acts before the first edition of the book is exhausted. Pin your $2.00 to the letter and mail today.

Could anything be easier? And could a man find one good reason for not accepting that offer?

This method of ordering requires little effort

Here is another:

> Don't wait! The enclosed postal will bring you full particulars without obligation. Sign and mail it TODAY.

A typewriter company also uses the idea admirably when it says:

Dear Mr. Graham:

You will, of course, as a matter of convenience and economy, install stock racks in your new factory — racks that will classify your supplies and make them easily accessible.

Statement of fact wins confidence

But in addition to securing these advantages you will want racks that occupy no more space than your supplies actually demand. Every foot of space in your factory is a fixed expense to you; it costs you money every day year in and year out.

Explanation of need

This one feature of compactness alone makes the Thompson steel rack superior to any other device in use for the storage of parts and supplies. For the Thompson is adjustable to every varying demand. You don't have to waste a large bin on two or three parts and stuff a small bin to overflowing. You can adjust each bin separately to the nature and quantity of the articles it contains, so that parts are given not an inch more room than they actually need.

Explanation showing how need is met

Yet as your supplies or stock increases, you will find these racks capable of unlimited expansion. You can make additions at any point to meet increasing requirements. Each section is a unit, and new sections fit perfectly with the old.

Advantages set forth

And Thompson racks are built to last. Constructed of the most durable steel, they are tested to hold the heaviest loads, no matter how unequally placed.

Explanation of quality

Fill out and mail today the enclosed post card — it will bring our representative to give you a complete estimate of your needs. This information puts you under no obligation and is yours for the asking.

Brought to a definite point in close and clincher

Very truly yours,

LEADING THE PROSPECT TO THE BUYING POINT

Beginning with a statement with which the prospect agrees, this letter leads him step by step to the buying point. Almost every paragraph contains explanation. The salesman recognizes the needs of the prospect and shows how the article offered for sale will supply his needs now and later.

The factory is working to the limit these days, and we are behind on orders now. But we are going to hold the machine we have reserved for you a few days longer. After that we may have to use it to fill another order. Sign and send us the enclosed blank today, and let us place the machine where it will be of real service to you. Remember, it is covered by a guarantee that protects you against disappointment. If you don't like it, simply return it and back comes your money.

A complicated coupon arouses suspicion

The enclosed blank, post card, or other ordering device should be simple and easily understood. If it is long and complicated, it is likely to arouse the suspicion of the careful business man. Before signing, he has to scan the offer critically for possible loopholes and "catches." The ideal form is one that can be comprehended at a glance. The shorter and simpler the form, the better.

A guarantee blank wins confidence

There is something about a guarantee blank, too, that coaxes the pen to its dotted lines. A safety razor manufacturer who sold his goods on approval enclosed with his sales letter a legal looking return contract that read:

ABSOLUTE GUARANTEE

I deposit herewith $2.50 for which please send me absolutely without further cost your * * * Razor. It is understood that if I am not perfectly satisfied with my investment, I will return the razor to you within ten days, and you will refund my full $2.50 promptly and cheerfully, cancelling the order.

Such a protective guarantee wins the confidence of the prospect, and this form got many a buyer because it showed him specifically that he could not lose.

The use of a serially numbered coupon

A business school found a winner, too, in a serially numbered coupon which it enclosed with a letter telling of a special offer to students. Each coupon read:

This serial coupon will be accepted as $5.00 in cash payment toward the tuition for our regular $18, twelve-weeks' course in bookkeeping, if properly signed and mailed within seven days following receipt of this letter.

But when you give your man something to sign, guard well against obscurity. It is human nature to search a wordy order blank for statements with double meaning.

There never was a proposition that didn't have possibilities of a sales climax, and there never was a sales letter that didn't have a place for a clincher. If you can't give the reader something to sign, do the next easiest thing. Note, for example, the way the man winds up who solicits my typewriter ribbons for re-inking:

Another form of clincher suggested

A trial will convince you, and the sooner you send them the more you'll save. Why not press the button and have them packed up and shipped right now?

Another letter closes:

You have only to reach over to your telephone, and tell us to attach a dictating machine feed wire to the lamp socket in your office and leave the instrument there at your elbow for a few days while you give it a chance to prove that you have been wasting a good deal of very valuable time, every day, and missing as great and continual a convenience as the telephone.

This letter shows how easily the machine may be installed

Note that this letter suggests not only how easy it is to put in the order—merely use the telephone beside you—but also how easy it is to install the machine—no alterations, no interruption of the work in the office are necessary; the machine is attached to the light socket as easily as you would put in a new electric bulb.

A good climax is the antithesis of procrastination. It gets the reader in motion. It tells him what to do. It makes him reach for his pen, sign, seal and stamp his order, and run to the mail box. It brings him up to the buying point, as in the letter on page 115.

The clincher closes the sale and gets the money

The clincher is the only kind of close that makes a sales letter bring results. Give your man something to sign or at least give him something so easy to do that he can't help doing it. Tell him how and what to do, and tell him to do it today. Try it, and you will find your sales letters picking up the shekels like a magnet.

CHAPTER XIII

DEVELOPING A FOLLOW-UP SERIES

Variety in bait is needed in sales letters, as in fishing

"IF THE fish don't bite, keep changing your bait. If they don't bite then, change your fishing-hole." This is sound advice for every amateur fisherman, as any gray-haired angler will tell you. It is equally sound philosophy for selling by mail, as every successful salesman knows.

Mail sales campaigns are rarely worked up on a single sales letter complete in itself, but rather on a series of letters. The object of your selling campaign may be to make a certain class of prospects buy your goods through a series of letters directed at that one class. Or the object may be to pull orders from many classes of prospects in the same list by means of a series of letters each one of which convinces a different class. In both cases the success of the campaign is due essentially to the fact that the salesman approaches his prospect each time from a new angle. He changes his bait.

A follow-up series changes the bait in each letter

He presents his proposition from a different point of view. This is the heart of the whole matter. He hopes that one of his arguments will hit the particular need of a certain class of readers, and arouse an interest that will result in orders from them. Another argument will get a response from another class, and so on. He recognizes

that men are not all alike, and that it is a waste of time and money to keep trying to reach them all by the same appeal. Then if a change of bait doesn't work, he changes his fishing hole.

A follow-up campaign lands orders that the single sales letter misses

A single sales letter cannot be expected to exhaust the selling possibilities of a list. It will get orders from people who are already familiar with the article and are easily convinced that they want it. Just how many will respond will depend upon the nature of the proposition —upon the kind of article and the special inducement that is offered. If the goods are of universal or general value, and an especially attractive price is made, the percentage should be comparatively large. For instance, in a campaign for selling safety razors for twenty-five cents, an enormous number were sold by one letter. This price was so very small that people jumped at the chance to buy. On the other hand, if the article is new or if it involves the expenditure of considerable money, the customer must be led more or less gradually to appreciate it and to see that it is worth the money to him. He must be educated as to its value. Hence more than one letter —a series of letters—is needed. These constitute a follow-up series.

Two classes of follow-ups:

1. General publicity

Roughly speaking, sales follow-ups may be divided into two classes—the general publicity and the direct-sales follow-up. The object of the first is primarily to keep the firm's name and goods constantly before the public. For instance, a firm may, from time to time, send to its customers notices of special sales or the arrival of new lines of goods. This periodical letter may be merely a formal notice of the event, or it may introduce some seasonable sales talk.

2. Direct sales

But the periodical letter does not hammer away, letter after letter, on any one article or line of goods. On the other hand, this is precisely what the direct-sales follow-up does. It is carried on for the purpose of selling a certain article to a list of prospects, and it makes

continued and varied appeals to them until the sales possibilities are exhausted—until the returns are so small that a continuation of the campaign will not pay. In other words, the direct sales follow-up is a series of letters addressed to the same man with the object of making him buy a certain article. This is the kind of follow-up on which the emphasis is laid here.

Mere repetition of arguments is unsuited for direct-sales series

Hence the necessity for approaching the prospect each time from a new angle is evident, for mere repetition of the same argument or appeal may create a certain sort of interest, but will never bring in the returns obtainable under a variety of appeals. Mere repetition is extensively used in general publicity advertising. For example, if I am repeatedly reminded, day after day, to "Use Smith's Shaving Brush," that article is unconsciously fixed in my mind, and when I need a shaving brush, I am quite likely to buy Smith's. Such appeals, however, do not persuade me that I need it now and should buy it now; hence they are not suitable for the direct sales follow-up.

Each letter should emphasize one selling point

Each letter in the series, then, should make a new appeal, present a new argument. Each should emphasize one point. Other points—supplementary selling talk—may be added, but these are to be kept subordinate to the main argument. Also, as the series progresses, the preceding arguments may be re-stated briefly from time to time, but these, too, should not be made prominent enough to distract the attention from the main point to which this letter is devoted.

The letters on pages 121-125 form a sales follow-up series used extensively and with excellent results by a silo manufacturing company. In counties where the letters were mailed liberally, the cost of each sale was about half of that in counties where sales were made exclusively by agents.

A successful follow-up series

Each of the five letters makes a new appeal. The first emphasizes the wisdom of the silo idea and explains it

Dear Sir:

A silo is the beginning of farm wisdom. *Attention won*

Here's the big idea, the silo idea:

If your soil is rich, raise your stock on silage and fodder. Sell your expensive hay. Put your high-priced acres into a quick-money crop. *Three-fold idea quickly explained*

If your soil is poor, raise your stock for profit, and — for manure, which is worth more than money in the bank. Keep twice the stock you could on pasture and hay, and build up your land rapidly.

If you keep cows for milk, get the full flow, winter and summer, with a really cheap and succulent feed — silage.

Now, that's good farm wisdom, isn't it? *"The whip"*

You need a silo. When you are through reading our Silo Book, you'll know why we have the silo you've been wanting. Correct principles of construction and good workmanship produce the right silo. We'll build it for you, complete and ready to fill. Our experience and an organized force of construction experts enable us to do the work just as it ought to be done. And we'll charge you less than it would cost you to do it yourself. *Argument brief and to the point*

Be wise. If you will sign and return the enclosed card, we'll send you a booklet fully describing our silos, and also photographs of several we have built in your county. *Close whets curiosity*

Yours very truly,

THE FIRST LETTER

Even a silo can be sold by mail. An actual sales follow-up series used by a silo manufacturing company is shown on this and the following four pages. The first letter lays a foundation for the following ones by explaining the silo idea. Note how effectively this is done in five short paragraphs.

A "story" quickly told easily wins interest

You are carried right along

"The whip"

Convincing argument

The "goods" offered for inspection

Dear Sir:

If a man should come along the road some day while you are plowing corn and say to you,

"If you will pay me $400, I will take 10 acres of your corn before it matures and make 20 out of it for you and do that every year for the rest of your life,"

You would consider that a good business investment, now wouldn't you?

Most of the farmers up in my part of the state do, too, for you can see a silo on every farm, and it's a good grain country, like yours.

Why?

Because they know a silo is a good investment. They know that under the old methods of feeding they can not raise cattle at a profit despite the demand for meat. They cannot keep one head of stock to every acre of ground without a silo. They cannot build up their land without raising more stock. Can you?

If you expect to invest in a silo, it will mean money in your pocket to read carefully the booklet we sent you. Study closely the advantage of our method of construction. Good construction is necessary to produce the greatest percentage of good silage at the lowest cost per ton. Drive over to Mr. Wilson's farm and see his silo. We sent you a photograph of it.

You can make your silo earn its cost before you pay us for it. When shall we come out and talk it over with you?

Yours very truly,

THE SECOND LETTER

A person is almost always willing to listen when he scents a story. Advantage is taken of this fact here to win attention. Notice how the opening paragraphs run into each other, carrying the reader rapidly along to a point where he agrees with the writer and is ready to see "the goods."

Dear Sir:

One day last summer while I was riding on a train through southern Illinois, a farmer friend sitting next to me looked out over the burning, sizzling corn fields, and said:

Another "story"

"My, I wish I had a silo. I could save enough of my crop to winter my stock at least, but I'll have to sell part of them. It's too late to build a silo now. So I must stand for a loss."

How about you? Are you losing the price of a silo before you see the value of it? Last summer's hot winds made many a farmer resolve to have a silo before another crop season. Will you build one?

Immediate application to prospect

If you don't, you may have to stand for a loss, like my friend. If you build a cheap stave silo out of pine or tamarac, you will face a bigger loss. If you build of brick or cement block, but without regard to tested principles in construction, you will stand for a still larger loss.

Clean-cut argument

You will NOT lose money, if you build a Rockwall silo. It will cost you no more than any permanent silo would cost, even should you build it yourself. Silage WILL KEEP in our silos. You will NOT lose money, if you use our experience. Our profits are simply the savings which come from buying and building in large quantity and our experience in erecting many silos.

Proof

Why not turn your possible losses into profits? Have you been over to see Mr. Wilson's silo? Ask any questions you wish on the enclosed card, and mail it today.

Lays basis for continued correspondence

Yours very truly,

THE THIRD LETTER

This letter also starts out in the narrative style. The incident is brought quickly to bear on the reader at the beginning of the third paragraph. The suggestion of possible loss is used to stimulate the reader's interest and thus impels him to read on in the hope of finding the means of preventing it.

Answers prospect's question without delay

Dear Sir:

Silage will NOT freeze — if you build right.

If you wanted a house that would be the coolest possible in summer and the warmest possible in winter, you would not build one with walls of sheeting one inch thick, but you would build double walls of brick six inches thick.

Explanation and description

That's just the difference between silos. If you want to keep silage, you must keep it from freezing. If there is only one freeze during the winter and the silage is not protected, it will freeze from 4 to 12 inches deep in from the walls, and thousands of cubic feet of good silage will be lost.

The Rockwall silo will keep your silage from freezing. The walls of our silo are not only six inches thick, but they are divided by two air spaces — dead air spaces — which stop the cold effectually.

The only silage which spoils in the Rockwall silo is that immediately on top, and this spoilage is necessary to keep the air from going down through the silage.

Silage does not spoil next to the walls of our silo, because the heat of fermentation is not lost. Our block holds the heat instead of conducting it away as does most cement and masonry construction. So the corn is all converted into good sweet silage clear out to the walls.

Continues to assume that the prospect will buy

Don't you want to talk it over with Mr. Farthy of our company? He is a silo expert and a pleasant fellow to talk business with. When may he see you?

Yours very truly,

THE FOURTH LETTER

This letter marks a split in the follow-up series. The prospect's question, in response to the previous letter, is answered directly and without delay in the first paragraph. The reasons for this answer are fully explained in the five paragraphs that follow. In the close, emphasis is laid on an interview.

Dear Sir:

Yes, our silo will pay.

You and I know anything is worth only what it can do for you, not what you choose to spend for it. That's just as true of a silo as anything else. You get what you pay for, and no more.

Personal tone wins confidence

If you want a silo that will last only a few years, buy a cheap one; don't buy ours. If you want a silo of doubtful construction, buy a cheap one; don't buy ours. But if you want a silo built as carefully as a battleship, one that will last many years, and cost you less per year than any other, then buy a Rockwall.

Persuasion

You can buy other silos for less money, but compare what others offer you with our list. Here it is — look at it!

Submits data for proof

Hard burned selected clay blocks.
Heavy gray-iron, non-rusting door frames.
Cypress wood doors, patent lock.
Iron steps for two ladders.
Bolts for chute and roof.
Reinforcing metal for foundation and every course of blocks.
Roof, frame and covering complete.
Specially constructed scaffold.
Detailed instructions and blueprints.
Freight paid on return of tools and scaffold.

Climax of the series

If your mason is not familiar with silo construction, we are prepared to furnish labor at your request.

Inducement

Mr. Farthy can drive out to see you next Monday morning. Shall I tell him to come? If any other date is better, check it on the postal card and mail it today.

Brings personal interview

Yours very truly,

THE FIFTH LETTER

Price and what it covers are reserved for discussion in the final letter of the series. The short and direct sentences in the first three paragraphs lead up to the climax of the series in the fourth paragraph, in which the superior advantages of the article offered for sale are emphasized in one, two, three order.

Analysis of points made in the series

pointedly; the second drives home the value of the silo as an investment; the third warns against probable but preventable losses; the fourth answers an important question concerning silage; and the fifth details exactly what the purchaser will get for his money, what the price covers. Supplementary points are added in each letter, but the main argument stands out.

Get the most effective arrangemen of arguments

The arrangement of the arguments in this and in every series—that is, the order in which the letters are sent out—is an important matter. It has been proved by tests that a change in the order will seriously affect the pulling power of the series. The most effective arrangement cannot always be determined a priori. The most that you can do when you map out a letter campaign is to arrange the letters tentatively in a certain order, which is based upon the experience gained from previous campaigns, or upon the testimony of salesmen as to the arguments which they have found most effective.

However, don't spend your money in mailing this series to your full list of prospects until you have tested it on a small list. Send it out to, say, five hundred or a thousand names, the number depending upon the scope of your campaign. Then keep a careful record of the returns from each letter. If the test list has been so selected that it is a representative one, the percentage of returns should be about the same from the large list. Consequently you now know which are the stronger letters and which are the weaker. Then on the basis of this test rearrange your series, and if necessary, rewrite your less successful letters.

Test your arrangement by a try-out

In this rearrangement do not make the mistake of using all your stronger arguments in the earlier letters of the series. The first letter should, of course, be a strong one, for it must not only get orders from as large a percentage of prospects as possible and thus save the expense of a further campaign, but it should also arouse

sufficient interest, among the readers who are not yet ready to buy, to insure attention for the succeeding letters. Then reserve one or two of the more effective arguments for the latter part of the series, for otherwise you will close with an anti-climax. Good selling talk will be required to bring into line the prospects who have resisted the appeals of the earlier letters.

Don't use all the best arguments in the first letters

The series as now arranged is ready to be sent out to the complete mailing list. Each letter will bring orders from some prospects, inquiries from others, and from still others no reply at all. The first class are dropped from your present follow-up list. The last will be retained to receive the following letters of the series. The second class, those making inquiries, will require a different procedure.

How to handle replies—especially inquiries

A prospect has indicated interest in some phase of the proposition and perhaps has made inquiries about special points.

To him, a new letter, not included in the original series, will be sent. This will, of course, answer his questions fully, and perhaps present new points. The subsequent procedure with this man will depend upon the nature of his question. If it indicates a field of interest not covered by the original series, and if this field is broad enough to warrant such a procedure, a new series of letters will be sent him, the original one, for the present, at least, being put aside. This new series will draw its arguments from the new field of interest.

When the inquiry needs several letters in answer

Suppose, for example, that after receiving the first two or three letters of the series on the silo, the man inquires if the value of silage as feed for cattle is sufficient to warrant putting in a silo. Here is a man who, obviously, needs to be educated to the use of silage; and the company may consider it worth while to devote two or three letters to this task. Then when he has been convinced, the original series of letters, hammering away on the advantages of the Rockwall silo, could be resumed.

When the inquiry can be covered in one letter

On the other hand, the question may be one that can be answered satisfactorily in a single letter, in which case, if this answer does not bring the order, the original series is continued. For instance, there is a split following Letter No. 3, p. 123. The prospect has sent in the card mentioned in the clincher in No. 3, with the question, "Can a silo be built so that silage will not freeze?" Letter No. 4 answers this inquiry. Then, as this question does not need further discussion, the original series is resumed in Letter No. 5.

The same procedure will be followed each time a new question is asked. The question is answered; and then the subsequent letters either follow the line of interest suggested by the inquiry, or return to the original series, as explained above.

Forms and personal letters used in the "split"

These new letters are not necessarily personally dictated letters, for in a large follow-up campaign most of the inquiries will fall into a few general groups which can be handled by forms. But if any person asks a question not covered by the forms, his special case must be taken care of with individual letters.

Elements composing the follow-up letters

The separate letters of a series—both the original series and the splits—will be made up of the elements discussed in the preceding chapters. Of course, not all the elements will be found in every letter; and the emphasis on different elements will vary in different members of the series, according to the conditions giving rise to a particular letter.

If the prospect has sent in several inquiries, for example, it is not necessary to start a reply with a paragraph intended primarily to gain his attention. You already have it. He may want only explanation. Or if he has thoroughly understood the article and terms of sale, the letters may be devoted chiefly to persuasion, or inducement.

The first letter of a series is frequently more comprehensive than the later ones, for it must contain

The elements vary in different letters of a series

enough information to give the reader a definite idea of the article or proposition. Hence in this one the description of the article or explanation of what it will do is, in many sales series, made full and complete. The later letters usually contain less general description, and will lay emphasis on persuasion—show the reader the benefit he will derive from the article—and on inducement. These are, of course, important in the first letter also; and, likewise, a fresh statement of an important point or points in the description is not out of place in any letter. Each letter has a two-fold purpose—to make the sale and to pave the way for the following letters—and the best combination to accomplish these two things must be determined in each case by the writer.

Length of the letters

The length of the letters cannot be set arbitrarily for all cases. Theoretically, the ideal length would be not more than one typewritten page, but many letters of two and even more pages have been effective. In general it may be said that a first letter in a series answering an inquiry may safely be made fairly long. The reader has indicated his interest, and if the correspondent uses ordinary care and skill, he should be able to write a detailed letter without sacrificing that interest. The length varies, too, with the class of readers; as, for example, a letter to a farmer may usually be made longer than one to a hurried business man. However, if you are in doubt as to the proper length of a letter, don't guess—make a test. Then you will have definite information on which to base your judgment.

How to conduct a test

We have spoken of the value of testing a follow-up series, both as to the length of the letters and the pulling power of the different arguments. How is such a try-out conducted? Send your series to a list of five hundred or a thousand names, selected from localities which you think represent average business possibilities. In this selection you will be guided by your experience in previous selling campaigns, by the reports of salesmen,

Select average localities—not the best or worst

and by your general knowledge of business conditions in your territory. But remember—don't select the best localities or the poorest; select the average. If you do this, your returns from the test should represent about the proportion of replies that you will get from your complete mailing list—if the conditions are the same.

This matter of conducting the test and the complete campaign under similar conditions, is important. The three most essential considerations to keep in mind are general business conditions, local conditions, and the time when the prospect receives the letters. For instance, if the test is made during a period of business prosperity, and in the interim between the test and the mailing to the complete list some event occurs which causes a retrenchment among business men, the results of your test will not agree with those of the larger list. The same will be true if a local drouth, or other cause produces hard times in any locality. Also the number of replies will vary with the time when the letter reaches the prospect. If it is mailed so as to be on his desk on Saturday—a busy day, or on Monday or after a holiday—when two or more days' mail has accumulated, the replies will not be so numerous as they will be if he gets it in the middle of the week or at a time when no holiday has piled up his work. It is hardly necessary to add that if the follow-up campaign is to be conducted in the fall, the test should not be made in the spring or early summer. This all means that if the results of your test are to be trustworthy, the conditions must be practically the same when it is sent as when the complete list is mailed.

Have similar conditions in the test and the big campaign

"Keying" the replies

When the replies from the test letters come in, they must be carefully tabulated. For this purpose, some system of "keying" the letters is needed. The return post card, addressed envelope, or other similar enclosures furnish the easiest means of doing this. The enclosure to be returned is different for each letter, and when replies are

Methods used in "keying"

received, they can be credited to the proper letter. Frequently also each letter of a series requests that all inquiries or orders be addressed to a certain clerk, indicated by a real or fictitious name, or to a certain department, as "Department A," etc. When the name of a clerk or the number of a department is given, the customer is likely to repeat it in his reply, even if he fails to use the return enclosure, and thus the inquiry can be assigned to the letter which inspired it.

The value of the test

A test is easy to conduct, and its results are indicative to a high degree of accuracy of the returns later from the complete list. With such a convenient and cheap means of finding out the weak and strong points in your follow-up series, there is no excuse for the reckless expenditure of money on expensive, untried campaigns.

A follow-up campaign could not be carried on without form letters. The ideal follow-up would be one in which the correspondent knew personally each of the prospects to whom he writes, and then dictated a letter which would conform to the individual prejudices and tastes of each one. But the realization of such an ideal is impossible. In the first place no correspondent could be expected to know even a small percentage of 100,000 prospects, and if he did, he could not take the time to dictate a special letter to each. Hence a follow-up campaign is dependent on forms. These may be either complete letters or single paragraphs. The former are used in the original series—the one mailed out until a split occurs—and also in handling the more common inquiries which require the same answer. For other inquiries which occur frequently but in different combinations in different letters, form paragraphs are used. One is prepared to answer each individual inquiry, and these paragraphs can be combined to handle any given set of questions.

Follow-up campaigns are made possible by form letters

The objection frequently made to forms is that they

are cold and impersonal. However, this is not necessarily true. The form letter can be made to convey the impression of personal interest if the writer will keep in mind one essential point. He should write to individuals, not to men in the mass. This means, not that he must know every customer personally, but that he should select some man of his acquaintance who fairly represents a certain class of customers, and then, visualizing this man, write the letter as if he were talking to him.

Forms need not be impersonal

The value of the form letter written for the individual rather than the mass and carrying the conviction of a personal interest is recognized by many manufacturing companies in promoting their sales. These companies make a practice of supplying their dealers with form letters for their local mailing-list. Such letters may or may not be a follow-up series. They are, of course, sales letters. They may be supplied in quantity by the manufacturer and typed on stationery bearing both his name and that of the local dealer, or they may be typed on the stationery of the local store and carry only the dealer's name. These letters naturally refer to the manufacturer by name and focus on his product, but they are always worded as if written by the dealer. A number of clothing and shoe companies have established the practice of sending their dealers such letters just before the vacation, Easter, or Christmas holiday sales campaigns.

Manufacturers' forms supplied to dealers

This kind of form letter is closely allied to what is commonly called the dealer help letter. This form of correspondence is highly developed by companies that advertise extensively and whose sales policy does not stop with selling to the dealer, but includes helping him to sell to his customer. To make this policy yield its largest return, the cooperation between merchant or manufacturer and dealer needs to be enthusiastic, close and constant. After reading an advertisement the prospect fills in the attached coupon or writes a letter asking for

Dealer help letter

a catalog, or sample, or information, as the case may be. Two courses are then open to the manufacturer. He may answer the inquiry directly, refer the prospect to the local dealer, send the latter the prospect's name, and consider the transaction closed; or he may follow up the prospect himself with a series of letters, urging the advantages of his product and of the service of the dealer. At the same time the dealer is in a position to seek an interview with the prospect, verify the information in the letters, and close the sale. By this second course the customer is under a double fire, as it were, and the chances for making a sale are increased. The cost of the sale may be greater and the margin of profit smaller, but this may be offset in the long run by the greater number of sales. Which course shall be pursued depends very largely on the business itself.

Two ways of handling dealer help letters

Too often where companies pursue the former course, dismissing the prospect with one letter and turning him over to the local dealer, the prospect gains the impression that the manufacturer wants to get rid of him as quickly as possible, as in the following actual letter:

Dear Sir:

Replying to your favor of recent date, we beg to advise that A. W. Kissler, 442 East Cleland St., has the sales of our machines in your city and we have today referred your inquiry to the above named dealer, who will be pleased to give same prompt and careful attention. Thanking you for this inquiry and trusting we may receive an order for one of our machines through this dealer, we remain.

How a letter can deaden interest

Now, notice the contrast with the following dealer help letter:

Dear Sir:

Did you notice when you read the advertisement of the Blackwell marine engine that we left out one mighty important dimension? We did. It covers a point of great importance in the design of an engine, and a point where the Blackwell is particularly strong, that is, the size, strength and weight of the main bearings. Without proper bearings no engine can continue to give good power, good service, and long life.

How to stimulate greater interest

We left out that dimension because we want you to see the bearings for yourself, and for that matter you want to see the whole engine, too. You don't have to wait until you buy the Blackwell to find out how it works. Just run over to 712 West

Adams St. and ask for Mr. Fred Price of W. F. Price and Sons. Mr. Price will tell you all about the bearings and let you run the engine yourself, if you wish. You can test any engine he has in stock and buy it afterwards. Isn't that a fair proposition?

Mr. Price will be looking for you. Later, if he should be out of the city at any time, as he often is, his brother, George Price, will show you the engine. Write to us again, if necessary, and we will serve you in any way possible.

"Ginger-up letter" to salesmen

One other form of correspondence may be mentioned in connection with sales follow-up letters. It is what is often called the "ginger-up letter." Only indirectly is it a sales letter. One of the difficult problems a sales manager must solve is how to hold his salesmen to the same keen interest in their work that marked their days of training in the home office before they were sent "on the road." One way to do this is through the ginger-up letter. The term is almost self-explanatory. Anything goes into the letter—a story, a bit of company news, a joke perhaps, a clipping from the trade paper—anything that will stimulate the salesman and thereby increase sales, anything that will keep alive the personal contact between manager and man, provided it does not endanger the manager's control. For example:

Dear Mr. MacNicol:

John Whitman now has his name on our roll of honor.

When a man is engaged in battle and does an heroic deed, they give him the Iron Cross or the Victoria Cross. When he is engaged in the battle of business, he is entitled to honorable mention when he does something unusual.

A "roll of honor" letter

The story of Whitman's feat of salesmanship is this:

He called on a customer in Kansas and learned that he was ill and in a sanitarium twenty-two miles away. Whitman could have written to the home office that his man was sick and proceeded about his business. But the breath of battle was in his nostrils. He wanted an order, and he had confidence in his ability to get it. Instead of riding on a famous black charger as General Sheridan did at Winchester, Whitman took an automobile and drove to the sanitarium.

While his patient lay on a cot, Whitman sat beside him and displayed samples and models, and took his order. After a while the doctor pulled Whitman away, but not until he had an order for $950 worth of goods. Then he took the doctor downstairs and sold him a suit.

We think you will agree that this is an evidence of enterprise, resource, and courage.

CHAPTER XIV

NEWS VALUE

THERE is one impression that you want your letter invariably to give—you want it to appear as a "today" product, a strictly live, up-to-the-minute communication from one man to another. And there is one way that you can give it this liveness better than any other—give it news value.

News stories make letters alive and up-to-date

What the world wants and has wanted since the beginning is news. The business world is no exception. If you can tell a man something new, particularly something that has a relation to his business, you can get his attention and interest. Put the information into your letter, give it a sales twist, and you can make of it a correspondence asset.

News as used in sales correspondence is of two kinds. You can take some live public topic, a good piece of newspaper news that you know must be familiar to the man addressed, and give it an application that will boost your own goods. That's one brand of sales letter news, and it makes your paper talk bristle with up-to-dateness.

Two kinds of news: public topics and trade news

Or you can give your prospect a bit of trade news, some item connected with his business and yours. This is of particular sales value, because when you approach

a man tactfully about his business, you are sure to touch a responsive chord.

Public topics

The first kind of news—the live public topic—you will draw chiefly from the daily papers. News of this sort can be pressed into service by any man who sells his goods through letters.

Two examples of effective use

A watch manufacturer, for example, wrote:

> One of the last things that Commodore Peary did before sailing on the expedition that found the Pole was to purchase a ———— watch. Could you imagine a stronger testimonial to the ———— as a perfect timekeeper under all climatic conditions?

There is news, human interest, and an abundance of proof in a reference like that. It makes the letter live primarily, and it also carries more conviction as to quality than could volumes of argument.

Here is the way a retailer with a clever turn of mind made use of a local disaster:

> Dear Mr. Henderson:
>
> No doubt you read in the Journal Monday that the dwelling house of Mrs. Findlay, on Front Street, was destroyed by fire. The fire was caused by the explosion of a gasoline stove which Mrs. Findlay was using in her work. In attempting to extinguish the flames, Mrs. Findlay was badly burned on the face and hands. Everything she owned was destroyed, and the loss will reach $2,000.00.
>
> We simply want to say this: that if Mrs. Findlay had had a gas range, this would not have happened. A gas range is safer, and much cheaper than gasoline. Now is the time to buy your wife a gas range and make her work a pleasure, and her life secure.

Miscellaneous topics of interest to readers

Accounts of injuries and deaths through accidents can be used to good advantage in accident and life insurance letters. Burglaries, particularly local ones, make strong appeals in letters from locksmiths, hardware dealers, burglary insurance men, bank and safe deposit men. News items regarding impure water can be made use of by the dealer in filters. There are a thousand opportunities for the retailer, or any other man, to make his letters live (page 137).

The other kind of news—trade news—may be found in your everyday work or your trade paper. After all,

Dear Sir:

Did you read this clipping about the boy bandits? It substantiates our claim for ease of control and flexibility, and shows that during the chase the young bandits traveled 74 miles, making fifteen starts and stops. The matter of turns and other performances proves that the North Star automobile is the most easily controlled car on the market today.

Compels attention

The car was driven over a curb, down an embankment, and across a vacant lot without injuring the tires or steering connections, and without breaking the springs. In attempting to follow it, the motorcycle policemen smashed their tires in jumping the curb. This proves that the wonderful tire mileage North Star owners are securing is not a question of luck, but an engineering feat of more than passing note.

Forceful description focused on the goods

Shall we explain to you the flexible construction of the North Star and show why this performance was possible?

Ends quickly in a strong climax

Yours truly,

PUTTING NEWS VALUE TO WORK

With this letter was enclosed a newspaper clipping describing a chase by the Chicago police of a band of young robbers who had stolen an automobile, and had used it in a series of daring robberies. The manufacturer made the incident the text for a convincing demonstration of the strength of his car.

it is simply a matter of telling your man something of newsy interest about your goods. It may be a new model you are putting on the market, a new service you can give the dealer or the user. Again it may be simply advice as to coming fashions, or a suggestion as to the best method of handling certain goods. If it is given the news turn, it gets the interest. For the retailer who uses the mails to keep in touch with his customers or for the manufacturer or wholesaler following up his trade, this is the kind of news that counts most.

Trade news —always of value

Here, for instance, is a newsy letter from a fork manufacturer to a retailer. It is good because it gives him an idea that he probably has not thought of before, and best of all, it has practical value:

Examples

Dear Mr. Dealer:

When business is slow, and you have some time on your hands one of these warm days, wouldn't it pay you to telephone every coal dealer in your town, and try to get his order for coal and coke forks?

Next season's supply of fuel will be largely delivered to residences during the remainder of the summer, and the haulers will need forks.

Here is our heavy goods catalogue, showing all patterns and sizes. Please write us if your jobber cannot supply you with whatever you want.

Every housewife wants to know what the store has in the way of new goods that she can use. She is glad when a Montana grocer writes her thus:

The first shipment of that delicious white plume celery arrived by express today from Kalamazoo, and although it came a long way, it is just as crisp and fresh as when it left the celery city. Just call up 72, and we'll send over as much as you want at ten cents a bunch.

A novel use of advance notices of styles

Advance notices of coming styles are especially good news items for the lady customer; and if she gets them in a letter, she will be far more impressed with the store that writes her than she ever would be through reading them in its newspaper advertising One storeman managed this matter very effectively by sending a list of names of lady customers to its Paris buyer and having style letters sent from there direct. The novelty of get-

ting those personal letters from abroad, combined with the actual news value, brought results.

News drawn from your own methods of doing work

What you consider just common things may be news to other people. For instance, here is the way a laundry man makes news out of his methods of doing work:

Dear Mr. Norton:

You'll often find among your new laundered collars, some that are scratched or blistered on the seam. (That is, unless we do your laundry work.) It is not a necessary evil, either. The explanation is simple. The seams of a double-fold or wing point should be evenly dampened before folding. Otherwise it blisters or cracks. We have a machine to dampen those seams. It must dampen evenly, for it does it with mechanical precision. So you will get no cracked collars back from us.

Just step to the telephone and call up Main 427, and your laundry will be ready for use whenever you want it.

And here is another letter that gets the idea, this from a bird fancier:

A letter on canaries

Dear Sir:

We have just received a consignment of St. Andreasberg Roller Canaries which we can offer you at the special price of $3.50. These birds are really a second grade of Golden Opera Singer. During their course of training some birds make mistakes—others take up false notes. We call such birds St. Andreasberg Rollers. They sing just as often as the first grade birds, and they all sing at night; but each bird has some slight imperfection in his song.

Now, personally, I have no possible use for a canary, but this man almost sold me a bird simply because, with what was news to me, he got me deeply interested.

Just keep this matter of news value in mind when you run through the letters that come to your desk tomorrow. Although you may never have stopped to analyze it before, you will find that the man who tells you something new, the man that throws into his message some bit of live, up-to-now information—that man gets your interest.

News interest will enliven otherwise dead letters

Put the idea to use yourself. You will find news making your dull, dry correspondence sparkling with life. You will find it giving new pulling power to letters that have been going to the discard.

CHAPTER XV

GIVING YOUR LETTERS PERSONALITY

The salesman with a personality is the one who gets the orders

YOU have a new line of goods to introduce, and you advertise for salesmen to handle them on the road. Most of the applicants are ordinary in speech, ordinary in appearance, and obviously of ordinary ability. A few stand out from the others. Their speech is forceful, they have the knack of presenting an idea in a new and interesting manner, they give the impression of being resourceful, of being able to adapt themselves to any conditions. They are alive and aggressive. They have personality. Which men will you hire?

Why, then, be content with the ordinary, the commonplace, sales letter as your traveling representative? Why expect it to be successful when you are afraid to employ the ordinary salesman who is lacking in personality? The same principle applies to both.

The sales letter also must have personality

If you expect your campaign by mail to get big results, you must make your letters distinctive and individual. Give them a personal touch. The ordinary letter has no individuality, no personality. And, like the salesman without personality, it cannot arouse the interest and desire of the customer. We say of such a man that he is "uninteresting." So is the letter. The letters on pages 142 and 143 illustrate the difference.

Letter personality means partly originality

The letter with a personality, then, must be original in thought and expression. Read a dozen sales letters that were placed on your desk this morning, and what do you find in the majority of them? The same stock ideas clothed in the same colorless and obsolete phraseology. Apparently the writers not only did not care to be original, but actually tried to make their letters conform to the old obsolete forms. Seemingly, their only anxiety was to show that they were fully accredited graduates of the "We-beg-to-advise" school of correspondence.

It dispenses with the stereotyped beginning and end

We have already discussed the evils of the stereotyped beginning and close of the business letter in general (page 10). What was said there applies to all business letters, but it is especially true of the sales letter. In the latter it is doubly important that you should be careful to avoid anything that will deaden interest, for the success of your effort to sell to a man depends on your arousing and keeping his interest.

In the body of your letter, too, strive to get a distinctive touch that will attract the attention of your reader. For instance, compare the two following letters. Observe the stilted style of this tiresome, long-drawn-out sentence:

> Our connections are such as to make it possible for you to place your order with us right here in the city, where we can show you the goods and demonstrate the efficiency of our cars, and we hope that just as soon as you receive the catalogue you will look it over carefully and make it a point to call at our sales room which is connected with our general offices, and give us an opportunity to show you what our cars will do.

It requires freshness of expression

And then turn to the refreshing ease of expression in this from a local tailor:

> Do you know that Henry has been cutting clothes for some of Atlanta's best dressers for the last ten years, and that many of our old customers run in from out of town just to get that perfection of fit that they know only Henry can give them? This is just an indication of the confidence particular dressers have in our ability to give clothes comfort and satisfaction.

Here the writer has even referred to his cutter by name. The ordinary writer, if he mentioned the cutter

Dear Sir:

Fails to touch the reader's interest

Such good results were obtained by our customers using Reedman's Nitrogen Fertilizer last year that we have arranged to increase our capacity for production this year. A large proportion of those who used it last year have voluntarily written us giving us an account of increased crops obtained through its use. We have arranged for the production of a larger amount this season and accordingly have decided to reduce the price on larger orders.

The only specific material in the letter

In the future our five acre bottles will be furnished for $6.00 instead of $9.00 as heretofore. Fifty acres will be furnished at one time for $55.00 and one hundred acres at one time for $100.00. The price for single acres remains the same — and the garden size 50c.

Indifferent to sales

It is important that you send us your order as promptly as possible that we may have the nitrogen prepared and shipped from the laboratory to you quickly when you want it.

Unconvincing

Spring planting is now coming on, so that you should have the nitrogen on hand, ready for use when the weather is just right. Reedman's Fertilizer is the best and cheapest way for you to increase this year's crops.

"We hope," but don't care very much

We enclose booklet and order blank which we hope you will use now without laying it aside.

Yours truly,

A LETTER WITHOUT PERSONALITY

Here is an actual example of how not to write a sales letter. This letter is totally lacking in personality and in appeal. There is no sequence of thought, or climax. The writer actually closes the letter by suggesting to the prospect the very action that he does not wish him to take.

Dear Sir:

Have you heard what Matthew Harper did, over on his farm near Sherrington?

Piques curiosity in easy, conversational style

For three years Mr. Harper had been trying to get catches of clover and alfalfa, but the clover came up better than the alfalfa. Both were thin in spots, and each year the scorching August sun burned them both out. Then he heard about Alfaclo, which is only a trade name for the nitrogen germs (in liquid form) which all clovers and alfalfas demand. He tried out a bottle on his seed — and he got better results than he ever dreamed of. He got three cuttings of alfalfa, his clover was unusually heavy, and he received 12 to 14 pounds more of cream per week from the same cattle this winter than he did last!

Touches reader's own problem

Read the enclosed booklet. It tells you why Mr. Harper used Alfaclo.

Proof

Alfaclo is alfalfa and clover insurance. Figure up the cost of how much you actually lose, if you do get a catch and then it winter kills, or burns up, or comes up so thin that you have to plant it all over again. It is a good investment to pay $2.00 an acre for Alfaclo and to know your seed is properly inoculated.

Persuasion

To get you acquainted with Alfaclo we enclose our coupon check. It is good for 50 cents worth of new garden seeds with every bottle of Alfaclo.

Inducement

Your order sent by mail will receive just as careful attention as if you came in person to one of our stores. All you have to do is to fill out the enclosed order blank. Check the kind of garden seeds you want and the number of bottles of Alfaclo, and mail it today.

Easy to order

Yours very truly,

HOW GOOD PERSONALITY PRODUCES BUSINESS

Here also is an actual sales letter, offering the same article as the letter on the opposite page. Curiosity is piqued in the first sentence, and the reader's interest held through to the very last sentence. All the elements of the sales letter are carefully developed through the paragraphs. The letter is convincing.

at all, would have spoken of him simply as an employee. But this man recognized the value of the distinctive touch. Which letter gets your attention?

The personality of the letter must be pleasing

Thus far we have been considering the value of originality or individuality in the letter. But there is another element in letter personality. Go back to your salesman. It is not enough for him to have a striking personality—it must be attractive and pleasing as well. The egotist's is usually a strong personality, for he is likely to have opinions of his own. However, he is so engrossed with his own affairs that he has no place for other men's interests. A salesman of this sort will not sell many goods. Likewise a letter may have a striking personality—be original, distinctive, clever—and yet fail to land the orders. It will fail if it takes the wrong attitude—if it emphasizes the writer's interests instead of the customer's.

A pleasing letter personality depends largely on the man-to-man attitude

The chief element which gives the letter the right kind of personality is the man-to-man attitude assumed by the correspondent toward the reader. This attitude is partly the result of putting the "you element" in your letter (see the following chapter). The "you element" requires that you shall talk of the customer's needs and show him how your article will meet those needs (page 145). But the man-to-man attitude means more than that. To use it successfully, you must talk of his needs as if you were interested in them and wanted to help him. You must show a friendly interest in his affairs. That is what attracts you in a man, and it is equally effective in a letter. The following letter to a banker strikes this note successfully:

Note the friendly interest in this letter

Dear Mr. Brown:

As soon as I learned the other day that your bank was making special efforts to secure more depositors this winter, I had the manager of our printing department get the enclosed proof for you.

It is really the most significant announcement that has been made to American bankers in years. And even though it is being printed in some of the big magazines, where you might see it, I

Dear Sir:

I think if I lived away from the seashore and somebody wrote me, offering to send me fish right from the boats, I'd be mighty pleased. I'd jump at the chance to get it.

Easy reading and happy style

Perhaps it's because I'm so very fond of good fish, mackeral, codfish, and other kinds. But I don't believe I'm an exception — almost everybody I know likes good fish. You do, don't you?

All the "I" interest leads up to a strong "you" interest

Then why not let me send you some of my kind? You'll find it altogether different from the store kind — different because it does come to your kitchen right from the fishing boats.

My circular describes each kind fully and gives the delivered prices.

Short paragraphs help to hold attention to the end

All there is for you to do is to tell me on the order blank what to send.

Yours very truly,

EVEN FRESH FISH CAN BE SOLD BY LETTER

With this letter a fishing company on the Atlantic seaboard sold fresh fish to city folks living in Illinois. This chatty letter is a good example of the manner in which a correspondent may use "I" and yet express interest in "you." The tone of the letter is distinctly one of interest in the customer's needs.

Dear Sir:

Carries conviction from the start

Commodore and Mayor William Hale Thompson was right, when he said, "Chicago, the greatest summer resort city in the world, has become a reality".

When I bought the "Sea-Gull" last fall, I for one looked forward to the most pleasurable spring, summer, and fall that I had ever had—and I had it, right here in Chicago.

Tempting description

You see, with a boat, you don't have to follow any hot, narrow road, bounce over bumps, pay for new tires, or "eat other peoples' dust" as you do in an automobile. You are out on the broad, clear waters of the lake, with the city in perspective, your friends around you, an ice box full of cool ginger ale or something else down below, if you want it, bunks, lockers, toilet, electric lights, comfortable chairs to sit in, room to move around, power to take you anywhere you want to go—I don't ask for anything better.

Strong persuasion

I learned how to run the two-cylinder "fool-proof" engine in an hour. It runs like a clock, and drives her along hour after hour at a nice clean eight-mile clip. With one-man control—throttle, spark, lights, etc., accessible from the steering wheel, you feel like a "regular" monarch, as you "roam the trackless deep" with no limitations or restrictions except your own inclinations.

After the first wonderful cruises on the lake—steering the boat to any desired destination that fancy dictated, Jackson

HOW A BOAT WAS SOLD BY MAIL

An advertising man who owned the "Sea-Gull" wrote this letter and sent it to a selected list of prospects. He sold his boat to good advantage. Inquiries continued to come in. He took these to a boat broker and under an agreement with him received a commission of $50 on each deal closed by the broker. The

Park Harbor, Gary, Michigan City, Wilmette, Belmont Harbor, down the river to Lockport, up the north branch through the new drainage canal to Wilmette, then out in the lake and back to Chicago, or just out around the municipal pier for an hour in the evening with a party of friends before tying up at the mooring for a picnic supper and evening of pleasure in the clear bracing air—I found that my whole point of view, my philosophy, my health, my pleasure and joy in life, seemed to have taken on a broader character.

Persuasion

To my mind the "Sea-Gull" is the staunchest, most sea-worthy, the best-built and the most satisfactory boat that I have seen around Chicago. I keenly regret that I must sell it.

Explanation that prepares prospect for reduced price

The boat cost over $5,000 to build. She is built extra strong all the way through with very complete equipment and with solid mahogany upper works and interior finish—and you could not duplicate the boat anywhere as a second hand value for a cent less than $2,000. The fall is the slack season however, and I will let her go for $1,150 for a sale made before Christmas.

Summary

Wouldn't you consider buying the "Sea-Gull"?

Just drop me a line or phone me any time, and I will be glad to show you the "Sea-Gull".

Proof offered through personal inspection

Yours very truly,

letter was reprinted with favorable comment in a well-known magazine, and read by the president of a large eastern corporation who called the writer by telephone, arranged for an interview and offered him the position of western advertising manager with a large increase in salary. The offer was accepted. This is only one example of the interesting history that surrounds many sales letters. Tempting description, strong persuasion, and enthusiasm give the letter a striking personality.

This friendly attitude begets friends

am having this special proof sent to you direct so that no circumstance can deprive you of the opportunity it offers.

Here is a chance to secure—in complete, worked out form—the exact, practical plan you need to double or triple your business—etc.

If you were a banker, would that letter get by you? It might, but I doubt it, for the moment you start to read the letter you must realize that someone is talking to you about a matter that is very important to you, and is talking as though he could help you and wanted to do it.

But the friendly interest must not be obtrusive

Of course, this friendly interest must not be made obtrusive. The degree of intimacy that you would use in a letter to a personal friend would be objectionable in a business letter to a stranger or even to an acquaintance. But if the offer is made tactfully, it is human nature to warm up to such an appeal.

The letter with a personality is distinctive

Try this appeal in your next sales letter, and watch the results. The letter with a personality—original, distinctive, and written with this man-to-man touch—will untie the wallet strings where the custom-made letter goes to the basket. It gets the business where the cold, formal, and impersonal communication falls on deaf ears. And this is true because the letter with a personality is "different." The letter on pages 146 and 147 is a striking example.

CHAPTER XVI

THE "YOU" INTEREST

YOU would probably leap up in burning wrath if, tomorrow, you could see your sales letters kindling a hundred morning fires. At least you would want to know why your sales letters interest only the man who empties the waste-basket—why they fail in their appeal to the man who counts, the man whom you expected to make a customer.

Why do your sales letters go to the reader's waste-basket?

If you are to find the answer to this question, you must sit down and analyze your correspondence. You may find several faults, any one of which is perhaps enough to kill a letter. But unless you have the point in mind, you may overlook an apparently simple fault—simple because the word at issue is so small and seemingly insignificant. The effect, however, is not insignificant, for this little word indicates a mistaken point of view, a totally wrong attitude toward the prospect.

As you analyze your correspondence, see if there is not too much "we" in the opening paragraph. Then, as you push your investigation into the body of the letter, underscore each "we" as you come to it. Haven't you literally peppered your letter with this word? If you have, there is one answer to your question.

See if they haven't too much "we" in them

From the beginning to the end, the average letter

consists of "we" have this to offer, "we" contemplate this, and "we" intend to do that. But what does the reader care about what "we" do? How are his interests affected by a statement regarding "ours"? The words that interest him most in a letter are "you" and "yours."

The reader looks for "you," not "we"

Forgetting this, the correspondent kills a hearing because he begins talking about his firm instead of about the reader, about "we" instead of about "you." For example, a clothier writes me a letter:

A tailor who forgot "you"

> We are showing the most attractive line of spring and summer woolens in the city. We assure you that the cut of every garment will be the latest and up-to-the-minute in style. We pride ourselves on the reputation we have made as the outfitters of the best dressed men in the city, and we know that if you will give us a call, we can satisfy you.

The writer of that letter was thinking more about his firm than he was about me and my needs. "We," not "you," was the important topic with him.

Now suppose this writer had said:

> Mr. Smith, do you spend $15 more than you need to for a suit of clothes? Let us prove that this is the case by making you just as stylish and as wearable a suit for $35 as you have been paying $50 for. You will look better and feel better in the clothes, and at the same time you will be saving money.

This letter keeps "you" and "your" interests in the foreground; consequently it appeals directly to the customer.

Again, a manufacturer writes:

A manufacturer who saw only his product

> We have perfected and are now prepared to supply our new, patent-lined, double-rimmed, rust-proof, excelsior gas burner—the peer of them all. May we not receive your order to install these burners in your office?

In this letter there is nothing which shows how the burner will benefit me. I am not an engineer, interested in the mechanical construction of a gas burner. The patent lining and the double rim are not of particular importance to me. The new appliance is worth while for me only if it cuts down my light bill or furnishes me a better light.

The writer of the following letter realizes that fact:

In contrast, this one thought of "your" light bills

See here, Mr. Gas Burner, you spend $2.50 a month more for gas light than you should, and yet in spite of this waste you are not getting the brilliant illumination you are paying for. I can cut your gas bills in two, give you better, clearer, brighter light, and save you $2.50 a month. And the whole outlay to you will be simply the price of our new gas burners.

This letter makes a very different impression, and as a result, after reading it I probably would have hurried to the mail box with a money order. Forget yourself and talk about the other man's profits, needs, desires. Look at your proposition from his point of view, and he will readily see it from yours.

Don't begin every sentence with "we"

Don't begin your letter and every other sentence with "we." You may be the ruling power in your own world, but your reader doesn't know it. To himself he is the king of his own little kingdom. He has so many things to think about that he isn't interested in what you are doing. And yet he is the man you must get close to if you expect to get any of his money. He is interested only when he is sure of getting some money himself. I at once became alive to the proposition when I received this letter:

Mr. Retailer:

Why is it that you—the retailer—are compelled to lose more good hard cash through bad debts than any other man in business?

Every month you have to charge up to bad debts, scores of good fat accounts that dead-beats refuse to pay. Mrs. Jones puts you off; Mrs. Smith tells you to wait; and so it goes—season after season. You could almost start a new store with the money lost by local retailers through bad debts.

Now suppose we could tell you how to stop this; suppose we could tell you of a simple collection scheme used by one retailer down in Illinois that enabled him to make thirty of his hardest and slowest customers pay up—penny for penny—the hundreds of dollars they owed him. Wouldn't you jump at the chance to get it?

Talk about "you"

Now, then, in the book described by the circular enclosed, you can get this very collection system; the simplest, most successful collection system ever devised; a system that does not require the assistance of an expensive collector; a system that you can operate without help—and the only expense is the cost of two or three two-cent stamps.

That is the kind of letter that jars money from my cash drawer. The guns of attractive argument and

Dear Sir:

Formal—"our" stock

Accept our thanks for your favor just received. We are glad of this opportunity to forward you a catalogue showing the styles which we carry in our stockroom ready for immediate use.

"Our" styles

Of course it is impossible to show all the styles which we make. The illustrations shown, simply represent some of the season's best sellers as selected by the leading retailers from our two hundred and fifty styles designed by our selling force.

"Our" oxfords

Our shoes are correct in every sense of the word. Our oxfords possess superior fitting qualities. They do not gap at the ankle; they fit close and do not slip at the heel; they are the coolest shoe for summer. We have them in green, red, tan, black and patent.

"Our" guarantee

Our guarantee is something that is of vital importance to you if you care to be assured of full value for your money spent.

"Our" catalogue

We can make any style required if you fail to find illustrated in our catalogue just the shoe you desire at the present time. We will forward the shoes prepaid upon receipt of your order with price, and will strive to serve you in a most satisfactory manner.

Yours very truly,

THE "WE" LETTER LACKS DIRECTNESS AND FORCE

Nothing robs a letter of directness more than a lack of the "you" element. This man tries to sell a pair of shoes by talking not about the prospect and his needs but about himself and his product. Note the prevalence of "our" and "we" in every paragraph. Half of the words are mere machinery.

Dear Mr. Sheldon:

What is more uncomfortable and aggravating than an ill-fitting shoe? — *"Your" shoe troubles*

Make up your mind that for once in your life you will have a shoe that satisfies you to the smallest detail — a shoe that does not slip at the heel or pinch at the toe, a shoe that will not wrinkle or run over at the side. — *"Your" wants* — *"Your" comfort assured*

The catalogue you requested is going to you today under separate cover. I want particularly to call your attention to the new "Easy Last" style on page 37. This may be just what you were looking for. But it is only one of the 54 attractive styles you will find illustrated. — *"Your" wants supplied*

Select the style and finish that you like best, then simply fill in on the order blank, the number, size, and width you want, and mail to us today. With this information to guide us we will send you, all charges prepaid, the very day that your order is received, a pair of shoes that will fit you perfectly. — *"Your" choice*

Do not miss this opportunity to obtain real, genuine shoe comfort. Send your order at once — today. — *"Your" opportunity grasped*

Yours very truly,

THE "YOU" LETTER TALKS LIKE A GOOD SALESMAN

In this rehandling of the shoe proposition on the opposite page the dealer comes over to the customer's side, just as a clever salesman would, and turns in to help him "get a fit." So the entire letter shows an understanding of "your" shoe troubles and "your" needs, and offers "you" satisfaction.

effective salesmanship are leveled directly at me. I must either get out of the way or stand and take the shot. I buy because "you and your collections" has been the attitude of the letter.

Show interest in the customer's needs

I am not interested in your proposition until you have shown some interest in my affairs. And you can never make me believe that you are really interested in me by everlastingly harping on "we."

A tire manufacturer answers my inquiry with this:

A tire manufacturer who did not

We have your favor of the fourteenth stating that you are interested in our advertisement of Wonder Tires. We are enclosing our Wonder booklet which illustrates and describes our Wonder tread. We would be very glad to give you any further information and our best price. Trusting that you will insist on Wonder Tires, we are, yours very truly.

Now I was interested in the advertisement, but is there one single reason in that "we" spotted letter why I should continue to be interested, why I should "insist" on having Wonder Tires? What I wanted from that manufacturer was tire talk that applied to me. His interest in the deal was obvious. It was mine that was essential to a sale. And that letter killed it.

Contrast it with this from a manufacturer who would sell me an engine:

An engine manufacturer who did

You know what a nuisance it is to set out to equip a boat and find that you haven't got this and you haven't got that. Before you finish, it has cost a quarter or a third more than you figured on.

Customers have often asked us: "What does your equipment include? Why don't you make it complete?" That's just what we're trying to do from now on—we are going to "put in everything." And what's more, we're going to pay the freight.

That man is talking to me. He knows my boat troubles. He's talking to me in my own boat house, and I read on through his description and sales argument with interest, because I feel from the first word that the writer of that letter understands my needs.

To be a successful writer you must talk about your customer and his affairs. See that you get the word "you" in the opening sentence. For example:

You can make a larger profit if you sell Duff's Molasses, than if you don't. Your customers want Duff's Molasses, and they are going to get it somewhere. You can make big profits by getting in line early,—and so on.

This letter means money to the grocer

The grocer is interested in this proposition because it offers to put money in his cash drawer. There is no more interesting proposition to him than that. When he reads this letter, he must decide whether he will order and make good profits, or stand idly by while his competitor gathers in the benefits.

The "you element" means emphasizing the buying points—not the selling points

And now when you have just about determined to inject some of the "you" element into your letters, cultivate the ability to get over on the buyer's side and look at your proposition through his eyes. A good salesman never mentions the selling end of his game; he emphasizes the buying point (pages 152 and 153).

You may think it selfish, but I repeat that the nearest subject to me is me. The most interesting theme with you is you. It is a human trait—as infallible as a physical law.

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